

VOLUME 8, ISSUE: 2 2007

# Kairaranga

Weaving educational threads. Weaving educational practice.







#### FRONT COVER

##### **Anna Moginie**

St Oran's College, Lower Hutt

The cover picture is a painting by Anna Moginie. Anna is a Year 13 student at St Oran's College in Lower Hutt. The painting is part of Anna's work for her Level 3 painting course. The theme of her work this year is "Climate Change

and Global Warming". In this painting she is expressing some of her ideas on this very topical subject.

Next year Anna is going on a Rotary exchange to Argentina and when she comes back hopes to study languages at Victoria University of Wellington.

St Oran's is an integrated Presbyterian college for girls from Year 7 – 13. It has a current roll of 375 students and will reach a maximum of 500 over the next six years. The school opened on its present site in central Lower Hutt in 1959 and has established a reputation for providing a high standard of education.

Art is a popular subject at St Oran's. It is a core subject from Year 7 – 9 and many students continue to take it right through to Year 13.



**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

*Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga*

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# Editorial

The art work on the cover of this issue of *Kairaranga* was chosen for its theme of global warming – an issue of importance to everyone. Key purposes of the journal have always been to consider human contexts and there is no bigger or more pressing context for the next generation than this.

The theme of human contexts is also followed through in the whānau research in which Berryman and Togo look closely at the family context for Māori children with behavioural needs and the notion of school as marae. Context is also provided by the “We know what you need ...” cornerstone article in which Glynn and Bevan-Brown examine how engaging and interacting easily with Māori in real cultural contexts can develop greater understanding.

The interview with Pat Caswell, who is a pioneering physiotherapist in schools, introduces us to the thoughts of a woman who is an innovator in her discipline. Pat describes in a low-key way how she approached her role and developed it to support young children with special teaching needs as they were gradually mainstreamed into schools. A trio of Auckland authors report the results of interviewing occupational therapists and physiotherapists within the Ministry of Education, Special Education. Stanley considers the impact of an aging workforce and looks at the developmental research to draw some surprising conclusions.

Wearmouth contributes a description of therapeutic practice which aims to view students as having agency over their behaviour in her “Talking Stones” practice article. The client voice is revisited in the article on parental suggestions for facilitating acceptance and understanding of learners with autism. This storied experience could easily be facilitated in the average classroom.

Examples of practice resources are included in the two further articles. “Do you know me?” aims to assist educators of children in early childhood and junior primary schools with a framework to consider concerns and support learning dispositions. The article on exemplar assessment considers current exemplars and relates their purpose to inclusive practice. The authors provide perceptive questions for reflection prior to the development of new exemplar resources.

Enclosed with this issue of *Kairaranga* is a reader survey, which is also available online at [www.minedu.govt.nz/kairangasurvey](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/kairangasurvey). Please take the time to give your feedback as this will help to further enhance the journal.

With the RTLB conference as our journal launchpad, the customary *Kairaranga* stand will be at the RTLB conference to act as a catalyst for ideas and a point of discussion for further articles that could be written. We hope that readers feel welcome to contact board members.

Noho ora mai, nā  
**Joanne Cunningham.**

<sup>1</sup> The late Ngarangiwakaupoko (Rangātira/Chief of Ngāti Manuhiri, Ngāti Kere) stated this vision for the people. *Māori methods and indicators for marine protection*. Retrieved August 6, 2007, from <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/Ngātikere.pdf>

Kua kai tātau i ngā kai o te māra, i tiria e o tātau tipuna  
Me tiri anō hoki tātau, kia whai hua ai ētahi oranga  
mō ngā whakatipuranga e heke mai nei

*We have partaken of the food garden, sown by our ancestors  
It is time for us to re-sow, to ensure sustenance for the  
generations to come.<sup>1</sup>*

## Kairaranga

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that all items in this journal are accurate and culturally appropriate.  
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# A Journey into Education

## An interview with Pat Caswell

**Merrolee Penman**

Principal Lecturer, School of Occupational Therapy, Otago Polytechnic

**Pat Caswell**

Physiotherapist, Ministry of Education, Special Education



### ABSTRACT

Previous interviews published in *Kairaranga* have given insight into the experiences, memories and stories of the founding editors of this journal along with well-known educational leaders; people whose research or work has shaped educational practices at local, national and international levels. However, a community of practice also consists of quiet leaders, who through their daily interactions and activities also help to shape the practice of others. This is an interview with Pat Caswell, a physiotherapist and one of the quietly achieving practitioners who works every day with children and young people, their families and whānau, schools and wider teams. Pat has both influenced and been influenced by her experiences in education.

### INTERVIEW

Pat is acknowledged by the therapy community as being one of the first, if not the first physiotherapist to be employed by the former Special Education Service making her a pioneer and leader in her area. Pat was less sure. "There's a lot of people working like I do, sort of in the background, making sure things are happening for kids. The first ones [occupational therapists and physiotherapists] have all been pioneers – all around the country there are people doing great things, and I think we probably don't recognise enough of them for that".

This interview with Pat recognises all the practitioners who are doing great things at the classroom level. To start the interview I asked Pat to describe how she came to work in education. Having worked at Mangere Hospital (a psychopaedic institution) in Auckland, then in antenatal and postnatal services in Auckland and Dunedin, Pat moved into education in 1987. She was initially employed at the Matariki Unit (an attached unit at Forbury School) which became Forbury Resource Centre when students with disabilities were entitled to enrol at their neighbourhood school. In 1996, seeking a new challenge Pat approached the Dunedin manager of the Special Education Service (SES<sup>1</sup>) and convinced him that a physiotherapist would have much to offer. She is still employed in the same position a decade later.

**M: Would it be right to say that you often came into positions where you were the first physiotherapist to be employed?**

P: Yes. For my work with children I was either the first physiotherapist to be employed, or the first to be employed after a gap in therapists, or at times, I was the only therapist in that service.

**M: What did this mean for you?**

P: I'd start the job and be presented with a list of names and a suggestion that I should just go out and see what I could do. A physio was seen as important but there was little understanding about specific goals for the children. But that meant that you didn't know what you were supposed to be doing. You had to work it out for yourself.

**M: Did you see that working in education would provide you with the opportunity to create your own role in a different setting?**

P: I didn't think too deeply about things back then. While I had to work out what I was supposed to be doing at the Matariki Unit (I was one of two new physiotherapists), I also learnt much from others around me, not only from other physiotherapists but from teachers and occupational therapists as well. For a while when I was the only therapist in the unit, I learnt lots of occupational therapy skills very quickly.

**M: What was it like to work at Matariki Unit?**

P: Children and young people came to the unit from 5 to 21 years of age. We had a physiotherapy room that had plinths and curtains that could be drawn around just like the physiotherapy department at the hospital. We worked in the withdrawal model which meant that at the beginning of each term we spent time timetabling the child into their outside class activities: physiotherapy, Riding for the Disabled, swimming, occupational therapy, the paediatrician's clinic at the school. Every Thursday morning was the "orthotics run" where the therapists took children into the Orthotics and Wheelchair Department at the local hospital for visits to review wheelchairs, splints or footwear.

**M: It must have been quite different then when the students moved out to start attending their local schools, and your work moved from "hands-on" to itinerating to the schools the students were attending.**

P: In some ways it wasn't that different in that I was working with the families who chose to move their children into their neighbourhood schools. These families wanted to have their child with a disability

<sup>1</sup> SES became known as Specialist Education Services after 1996, then became part of the Ministry of Education in 2002.

to be involved in their local communities for a number of reasons. Some had brothers and sisters at local schools, some were travelling quite long distances, and at about that time the special needs units started at Kings High and Queens High schools, so the older students moved into more age appropriate settings for schooling. So it wasn't difficult as I was already comfortable being around schools, through my work at Forbury and having followed my own children through the system.

**M: And you knew the children and young people from when they attended Matariki?**

P: Yes, I did know the children well. Naturally staff in their new schools were anxious about how the whole thing was going to work out. I think in the early days much of my work was giving a lot of reassurance to the teachers and staff. "This will be all right. You can cope with these children in your classroom and we can help you." One of the biggest changes was there weren't any timetables, and you didn't withdraw the children for treatment. If you did, there were only the medical rooms which were often also used as store rooms, or someone else was using the bed!

**M: What has shaped your work in schools?**

P: Education has always been important to me. At about the time I started at Forbury I managed to do a postgraduate paediatric module for two weeks in Christchurch. This gave me a taste for further learning. I was trying to find out how I should be doing my job, and the course did give me some ideas about what I should be doing and not doing but there was nothing about how working in education could be different. By the time I started itinerating, I was completing a postgraduate diploma through the School of Physiotherapy in Dunedin. I would call this the real start of my learning about education as we touched on alternative models of service delivery and were encouraged to look more widely about how we might meet the children's needs.

**M: And where did you go from there?**

P: This learning triggered an avalanche of wanting to know more which led to enrolment in a Masters of Physiotherapy. I never had any doubt about the topic because I had become defensive about my work in education as there seemed to be a feeling that what we did wasn't really physiotherapy. But I felt that if you were working in schools then it was obvious that things were going to be different. *The Role of the Physiotherapist in New Zealand Special Education* [Pat's thesis title] really picked itself.

I surveyed all of the physiotherapists known to be employed in special education which was about 36. I had a 97% return rate which was amazing for a postal survey. What I found really interesting was that therapists who identified that they were in itinerant roles answered the questions differently to therapists who were in special schools and attached units. You have to remember too that this was before *Special Education 2000*. These

therapists had started to shift their understandings about aspects of school based services such as how they worked in teams and the importance of IEPs. They talked about how you can't work in isolation, you have to talk to people, you have to look at the big picture.

It was exciting to see many common responses amongst these physiotherapists, most of whom worked in relative isolation. It was like they were coming to the same way of thinking despite working very much on their own, but maybe this happened because they were responding to the needs of the environment in which they were working.

**M: Where did your thesis lead to?**

P: I like to continue my personal learning while also making contributions to extending the knowledge of others and the organisation, so I've been involved in research projects, and worked with NZEI (New Zealand Educational Institute). I've been involved in the national induction workshops for both physiotherapists and occupational therapists as my thesis showed the importance of developing the knowledge and skills of therapists coming into what I think is a very special environment. I've been involved in projects on effective practice, and in workforce development. You never reach the end of it, you have to keep going.

**M: What one issue do you see arising in the near future?**

P: The groundbreakers, the children who moved into their neighbourhood school at age five in the early 1990s are now turning 21. Their families have certain expectations from their experiences of the education sector. How well prepared is society for these students and their families? Are they prepared to be inclusive, to work in partnership, to listen to what the young adult and their family wants? This must be a real dilemma for these people and their families – what will happen next?

**M: What advice would you have for therapists new to working in education?**

P: Don't be scared. Just go into the classrooms and do it. I still remember being given that piece of advice myself. When you go into the classroom it dictates what you are going to do because it is a space full of children and tables, picture books, puzzles and pictures. There is no way you can do anything traditional. But although it is a different setting to what you are used to, remember that you have got a contribution to make to the student's life in the school. The purpose of you being there is to facilitate a young person's access to their education.

**M: Why do you continue to work in education?**

P: Every day is a different day; every class is a different class; every year is different for some children; every year brings different classroom challenges and changes. That's the joy of it for me. We're there to make sure that the young people get the best out of their education. The physiotherapist adds to the picture by providing information about the physical side of things because we have that bit of extra knowledge that other people

don't. The really important thing about working in education and bringing on new physiotherapists is to help them to understand that we're not there to get 10 more degrees of knee extension; we're there to make sure that the student has the knee extension to climb the stairs or to play in the playground. While knee extension is important, it's the playing in the playground, getting on the floor to play with the maths equipment – they're the important things, and we need to solve the physical problems for the young people to allow them to do what they need to do.

Really, I believe that every physiotherapist is a teacher, and whatever branch of physiotherapy you are in, if you can't teach the person well, then change won't happen. Working in education lets me be that teacher. And the children and young people are also my teachers as they pose the little challenges that keep me learning, growing and developing. We each shape and influence each other in our everyday interactions.

## INTERVIEWER PROFILE

**Merrolee Penman**



### Merrolee Penman

Merrolee Penman is Principal Lecturer at the School of Occupational Therapy, Otago Polytechnic. Merrolee's practice interests have focused on children within inclusive education and the role of occupational therapists in local schools. Merrolee has been involved in a number of projects for therapists working in inclusive education, from the supervision of some of the first occupational and physiotherapists to be employed by Specialist Education Services (SES), to being involved with the development of the SES National Training course called Therapists in Education – Promoting Inclusive Practices. Merrolee joined the Editorial Board of *Kairaranga* in 2004, and was part of the team who produced the project with Pat and Trevor McDonald titled *Integrated effective service provision for children and young people with physical disabilities* (2002). Merrolee has encouraged a number of occupational therapists to explore the practices of occupational therapists in inclusive education through supervision of their honours and masters research dissertations/theses.

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## INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

**Pat Caswell**



### Pat Caswell

Pat is a physiotherapist in the Otago District of the Ministry of Education, Special Education providing services to students in both Dunedin and rural North Otago. Pat graduated with a Master of Physiotherapy in 1997; her thesis is entitled *The role of the physiotherapist in New Zealand special education: Present practices, future directions*. She is currently completing a Master of Education through the University of Otago. In 1999, along with Carolyn Simmons Carlsson, Pat co-developed and presented the SES National Training course called Therapists in Education – Promoting Inclusive Practices.

Pat has held a number of roles in the area of inclusive education including Southern Region Lead Practitioner: Physiotherapy between 2003 and 2005, and being involved in the preparation and administration of a survey tool designed to provide a comprehensive profile of the occupational therapy and physiotherapy workforces employed in the compulsory education sector. Pat has also been elected representative of physiotherapists and occupational therapists on the NZEI Advisory Panel for 2002, and is currently an NZEI workplace representative. Pat was the physiotherapist representative on the Ministry of Education's Reference Group for Students with Physical Disabilities in 2000.

Pat was a member of the Editorial Board for *Kairaranga* in 2004, a member of the National Advisory Group for the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education Ministry of Education research project from 2003-2004, and has been committee member, and editor of the journal for the Paediatric Physiotherapists Special Interest Group from 1994-1999.

She has been seconded to a number of short term projects including being co-author of a report for the Ministry of Education's Reference Group for Students with Physical Disabilities titled *Integrated effective service provision for children and young people with physical disabilities* (McDonald, Caswell & Penman, 2002).

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# The “Why” of Who We Are

## Exploring the “culture of practice” of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists

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**Dr Clare Hocking**

Associate Professor, AUT University, Auckland

**Valerie Wright-St Clair**

Senior Lecturer, AUT University, Auckland

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to describe the shared “culture of practice” of a group of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Data from individual semi-structured interviews, enriched by insider observations, were thematically analysed within a cultural constructs framework. An ethos of practice underpinned by notions of collaborative practice, occupational practice, social justice and building inclusive society was revealed, with core attitudes, values and beliefs commensurate with practice within an inclusion philosophy and organisational culture. That ethos is distilled into seven guiding principles. Therapists who were interviewed emphasised the enormity of the attitudinal shift entailed in leaving biomedical philosophies behind and embracing inclusion philosophy. The findings highlight the need for therapy-specific induction, supervision and mentoring for entering therapists, and the importance of preparing graduates for practice in non-medical settings.

### Research

#### Keywords

*Attitudes, collaborative consultation, cultural values, ecological perspective, educational policy, inclusion practices, inclusive education, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, professional practice.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Aotearoa/New Zealand government’s special education legislative framework (Ministry of Education, 2003, 2004a) mandates the right of all students aged between 5 and 21 years to attend their local school and learn alongside their peers, regardless of impairment or disability (New Zealand Government, 1989). For occupational therapists and physiotherapists, the shift in *right of access* to local schools heralded two opportunities. First, the opportunity to work in regular schools as members of itinerant interdisciplinary education teams (Ministry of Education, 2005a). Second, following international practice trends, it brought the challenge of developing and providing educationally relevant therapy services in schools (Barnes & Turner, 2001; Block & Chandler, 2005; Brandenberger-Shasby, 2005; Bundy, 2002; Case-Smith, 1997; Hanft & Place, 1996).

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services are provided to students in the regular education sector through a range of initiatives (Davies & Pragnell, 1999; Ministry of Education & Accident Compensation Corporation, 2000; Ministry of Education & Health Funding Authority, 1999). This includes the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (Ministry of Education, 2004b), services for students with moderate physical needs (Ministry of Education, 2005b), and Supplementary Learning Support (Ministry of Education, 2006). In addition, there are school property modifications submissions (Ministry of Education, 2005c) and health or education-funded assistive equipment provisions (Ministry of Education, 2002; Ministry of Education & Health Funding Authority, Disability Support Services, 1999).

The development and delivery of Ministry of Education, Special Education therapy services is guided by concepts such as inclusive education (Ballard, 1999; Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw, 2000), collaboration (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2002), consultation (Hanft & Place, 1996), moving beyond the withdrawal-for-therapy model (Swinth & Hanft, 2002), and using an ecological approach (Dunn, 2000; Law et al, 1996). The integration of therapy into naturally occurring school tasks and routines is advocated (Case-Smith, Rogers & Johnson, 2005; Coster, 1998).

Over the past few years a small number of researchers have generated insights into school-based practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Hasselbusch, 2007; MacDonald, Caswell & Penman, 2001; Marshall, Hocking & Wilson, 2006; Tutty & Hocking, 2004; Vaughan-Jones & Penman, 2004). However, few studies are available to guide the more philosophical aspects of therapists’ school-based practice. Accordingly, this study investigated the ethos of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists’ and physiotherapists’ practice, where ethos refers to the attitudes held by a community, its characteristic spirit.

The study was guided by ethnography and addressed the question ‘What is the shared culture of practice of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists?’ Culture refers to mores, customs, way of life, traditions, and society, hence our intent was to explore and articulate the group’s co-constructed meanings, their communally learned and shared attitudes, values and beliefs



about the “how” and “why” of practice. This included the therapists’ patterns of behaviour, situated within their practice settings. This aim fits with the growing awareness within occupational therapy that culture resides within professional groups and impacts therapists’ practice (Iwama, 2006). Thus, our primary presupposition was the existence of a “culture of practice” that would permeate Ministry of Education, Special Education therapists’ behaviours and mores, shaping “who” they are and “why” they are in their practice settings. We also presumed that an attitudinal shift was necessary for working with students in regular schools.

The study had three key intentions. The first was to inform the school-based practice of occupational therapists and physiotherapists; second, to facilitate induction into the organisation; and third, to provide a text that would assist therapists to reflect on their practice with school-aged students and inclusive education. The particular focus of this article is on articulating the group’s shared culture of practice and acculturation.

## METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

### Methodology

The study is situated within interpretive constructionism, which is founded on the notion that meaning is constructed not discovered. Using an interpretivist approach, we sought to uncover participants’ culturally-derived, historically-situated meanings in the ‘social life-world’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 67) of their Ministry of Education, Special Education practice settings. However because it is recognised that different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998), it is acknowledged what is so for participants in this study may not be so for those in different settings.

The methods were guided by ethnography (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001; Davies, 1999; Denzin, 1997; Fetterman, 1998), at the core of which lies the assumption that groups of people evolve a culture that guides members’ view of the world and patterns of behaviour (Polit & Hungler, 1997), enabling them to function (Crotty, 1998). Cultural meanings arise through the interaction of a subject (person) with other persons and objects (inanimate articles or artefacts), giving foundation, scope and validity to “how we know, what we know”. In the research field site, objects included therapists’ tools of practice (diary, assessments and therapy resources), policies and service guidelines, as well as physical spaces such as offices, schools and students’ home settings.

Together with a research audit trail (Ballinger, 2004; Trochim, 2002), participant validation was applied as a technique for establishing the authenticity and trustworthiness of the study (de Laine, 1997). All of the participants were asked to check their transcripts for accuracy. To enhance the credibility and accuracy of the results, data were triangulated by using a range of data gathering methods, including interviewing, field observations, reflective journaling and data checking with a range of sources. For example, the first author presented the preliminary findings to a regional Ministry of Education, Special Education peer group and sought consultations on

the findings chapters with “experts in the field”. She also reflected on findings in relation to her own observations and experiences as a member of the group and discussed these in supervision.

### The Participant Group

Participants who were experienced in Ministry of Education, Special Education practice settings and able and willing to ‘tell it like it is’ (Germain, 2000, p. 249) were purposively selected to ensure rich data from the insider perspective was accessed (Atkinson et al., 2001). In addition, in the role of complete-member researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), the first author was also interviewed by an experienced Ministry of Education, Special Education therapist at the beginning of the study. This interview followed the same question guide used for all participants in the study and the transcript became part of the data.

In total seven occupational therapists and six physiotherapists (including the first author) from 10 out of 16 Ministry of Education, Special Education offices around Aotearoa/New Zealand participated in the study. All 13 were experienced practitioners; the least experienced had 16 years of experience while the most experienced had approximately 40 years. All of the participants were women, had worked for the Ministry of Education, Special Education for more than 2 years, and were employed in part-time positions, ranging from 0.4 to 0.9 full time equivalent positions. Each participant had more than 7 years experience working with children and young people and had worked in both the health and education sectors. Twelve participants identified as Pākehā, New Zealand European, or European and one identified as Pasifika. All the participants provided itinerant services for students attending urban and rural schools who were eligible for special education funding support via the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes. Eleven participants also worked with students who met eligibility criteria for the Moderate Physical Contract and the Supplementary Learning Support schemes.

### Capturing “Insider” Stories

Data gathering utilised individual semi-structured interview methods, enriched by insider perspectives gained by the first author “being there” to observe, ask naive or insightful questions and to record what was seen and heard in her own work setting. Examples of interview questions were:

- What do you believe are the most important attitudes, values and beliefs to have in the Ministry of Education, Special Education work setting?
- How do you know you are practicing inclusion in the school setting?
- Describe the most important aspects of behaving as a Ministry of Education, Special Education therapist.
- Describe an example of successful practice.

Eight participants engaged in face-to-face, audiotaped interviews. To clarify emerging themes, a further five responded to similar shortened questions by email, which is in keeping with a style of communication typical to the Ministry of Education, Special Education practice setting.

Ethical considerations included separating the research information and field site observations from day-to-day practice to ensure relationships with colleagues were not compromised, and protecting participants' identities with pseudonyms along with individual coding on all transcripts and field notes. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the first author's role as overt participant-observer, the provisions for confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study without any adverse consequences. Data were carefully and consciously processed and the reflexive process of critically thinking about what one is doing and why was applied (Brewer, 2000; Davies, 1999), which allowed the first author to be cognizant of her own influence on the study and to acknowledge and make her own position and assumptions explicit. Being interviewed aided this process.

### Data Analysis

Using thematic analysis, explanations and meanings from participants' detailed vignettes were sought (Fine, 2003). To guide the analysis, a cultural constructs framework based on anthropological and sociological concepts was formulated. Drawn from Bates and Frattin (1999), Cockerham (1995), Haviland (1999) and Miller (1999), the framework assisted identification of themes and sub-themes by outlining the defining characteristics of a culture. For example, the construct enculturation included analysing data in relation to questions such as: What experiences do we share? How do we learn how to act, think, and speak in socially appropriate ways? What are the rules and how do we adjust them to fit our individual circumstances? How do we transmit and sustain our culture? What differences are there in perceptions of the culture?

A range of evaluative questions drawn from Katz (2001, 2002) also guided analysis. This included searching for causal or logical explanations by looking for any paradoxes within current practice and forces that shape beliefs, for example moments of strong emotion.

**Cassie:** Children with disabilities have a right to be out there in the world rather than shut up in a special facility ... I believe that all children should at least try the regular school environment, and they have a right to be there. I obviously have a belief around inclusion, otherwise I wouldn't be working here.

Similarly, it meant looking for things that might have shaped the group's social patterns, for example:

**Phillipa:** My belief system has shifted hugely. When I first went to the special school and was working on-site I used to see children who had daily therapy and [they] were just as contracted [*shortened muscles*] and disabled as any other child really. I didn't think that these children were straighter or better than any other child, even with daily physio, and so I decided then that that wasn't the answer ... there is no use taking a kid out once a fortnight, or once a month, and doing something to them and popping them back into the classroom, because it's not doing one iota of good. And that's where I think perhaps we can say to the family "how do you

think it is going to be beneficial to your child?" ... Going to [Ministry of Education, Special Education] and hearing another side of things ... [they] had a value system of inclusion, which I thought was pretty good, although I didn't necessarily agree totally with it. I've gone further along this line. The book that I've just read called *Disability is Natural* really is a reinforcement of that value system ... it's brilliant. Disability is part of life, and it's wonderful because it's been written by a parent. She calls therapy a "toxic antidote".

Analysis also meant looking for poignant or compelling accounts that reveal ways of working, for example:

**Pauline:** It means that a student with a disability is a student just like any other student. They just happen to have a disability and so the outcome effect is that they are included in normal daily life with some adaptations, because people have to make [*adaptations*]. ... I promote those values. And I think I also know that I am working in that sense [*inclusively*] because I am not imposing things on a student or a teacher or a teacher aide that actually require exclusion, that require the student to be out of the class. I always try to be very careful to make suggestions that can actually happen in the classroom.

Such analyses served to enhance interpretations and progress understandings from the "what" and "how" of the group's ethos to the "why". Central to all data analysis was the question: Does this theme or construct say something about a shared culture of practice and is it illuminated adequately and richly through the emic perspective to write a text that people would want to read?

### FINDINGS

A strong philosophy of inclusion was revealed, underpinned by notions of collaborative practice, occupational practice, social justice, and building inclusive society. In keeping with international trends, such notions forged the group's contextualised identity and contributed to much of the basis of the group's collective values and beliefs systems, expressed through the "what", "how" and "why" of their contextualised practice. Core values related to collaboration, communication, consultation, relationship building, and teaming. In addition the belief that students (with special education needs) should be perceived and valued as "students" was illuminated, with the challenges posed by impairment or disability perceived as secondary and of lesser consequence by the group. For example, one subtheme was "it's not about fixing the student", another was "going to school is not about having therapy".

### Unravelling the Ethos

In exploring the culture of practice in a group of Ministry of Education, Special Education therapists we arrived at their ethos, the core values and beliefs held by participants. These notions form the foundation of participants' practice narratives, which is summarised in the following statements:

- Inclusion is at the heart of all we think and all we do!
- Practice is about inclusion; it's about inclusive practice!

- We value students *being* students (learners, peers, friends, players).
- It's about enabling student participation and students learning in schools.
- It's about collaborative practice and collaborative consultation with others.
- It's about fostering societal change.

Underpinning these beliefs is an attitude that attempting to “fix” students’ impairments is out of line with service expectations, and would only serve to disempower students.

Most importantly, the study revealed that at the heart of the ethos sat inclusion philosophy. It was evident from the study that there was congruence between therapists’ values and beliefs and their patterns of practice behaviours, for example:

**Bonnie:** When I start doing classroom observations, the things I am looking for are whether the student is actually participating in the learning ... as their peers. Where they are sitting in the classroom, how interactive they are with other students? How does the teacher engage with them ... treat them compared to other people? One of my goals, if I see that not happening, that will be my first goal. How can we get some more of that happening? I would start there and forget about everything else, that would be the first thing I would tackle. Yeah. I think too the language that's used, the way other students behave towards the student. Looking at whether teachers talk to the student the same way they talk to everyone. Are they just one of the class and does the teacher just do a circuit and tap the student on the shoulder and say “that's lovely work” and keep going, just like they do with everyone else? You know, how [*is the student*] regarded in terms of sharing the teacher's time? Those sorts of things and the language that other students use – because I think they model that off the teacher ... I think our big focus is really on educating teachers to understand what their [students] needs are. I think my focus [*is*] getting the teacher to change, rather than the student, I think that's probably my prime focus of my practice.

It was also evident that a range of principles guided participants’ shared way of being. This included respecting and valuing others and their contributions, working in partnership, and teaming with each other. That meant being inclusive, being collaborative, communicating sensitively by listening to and hearing others’ voices and perspectives, and not being “the expert” whilst recognising that their expertise and that of others all contribute to students’ inclusion at school. It also meant de-emphasising biomedical perspectives of impairment, fostering student identity, and being ecological in their approach to assessment and intervention. Furthermore, the study revealed that these principles as organisationally embedded, mirroring findings from the Ministry of Education, Special Education 2004 field staff survey (Ministry of Education, 2004c).

### Being Enculturated

A key insight from the study was that all of the participants were enculturated by the inclusion worldview and their work

context, having blended past experiences with new beginnings to shape a contemporary and contextualised way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It was evident that these Ministry of Education, Special Education therapists were thoroughly enculturated into inclusion philosophy and inclusive practice. In addition, whilst participants may have come with a pre-wired professional cultural background, the study showed that they had adapted and changed to fit within Ministry of Education, Special Education culture. Cultural adaptation (Haviland, 1999) had served to shape the participants’ ethos, and in turn, allowed them to change and adapt in direct response to the events and changes in their new practice settings and circumstances.

All of the participants strove to be client-centred despite the problem of teasing out whose client-voice to attend to first: student, teacher, teacher's aide, principal, parent? In keeping with occupational practice and the ecological approach, they were community-focused in their practice, striving to provide services to students within the context of their daily occupations at school and their natural settings. Participants sought to remove both human and non-human environmental barriers in schools and foster student participation in the everyday life experiences of being active members of a school community.

Culture largely structures the behaviour of people, striking balance between the self-interests of individuals and the needs of a group or society as a whole. However, people are not passive participants of culture (Bates & Fratkin, 1999). Rather, they shape and modify culture and their circumstances as was found to be the case for the participants. The study showed that an inclusion viewpoint guided participants’ view of the world and their patterns of behaviour.

**Cherie:** Sometimes the most therapeutic solution is not the most inclusive solution for a student, but I will often choose the one that includes them over what might be [*therapeutically*] right as a therapist. For example, I provide a walker so they can get to the library at the same speed as their class, rather than use quad sticks, which take the child twice as long to walk the distance ... I keep the concept of inclusion in my head when thinking about what the student might need from me. I focus on their participation.

In keeping with current thinking, notions of inclusion, inclusive practice, social justice and citizenship (Neilson, 2005; Taylor, 2004) shaped participants’ worldview. This is part of the nature of people learning to be part of a new society. Individuals who are thrown together inevitably grow together through the process of enculturation. Where there is society, there is “culture”; neither can exist without the other (Haviland, 1999).

Culture tends not to be something people think about in their daily lives, except perhaps when faced with language or behaviours that are difficult to grasp and which seem to come from an “other” culture (Dickie, 2004). This was probably the case for the first group of occupational therapists and physiotherapists employed by the Ministry of Education, Special Education, who would have been faced with different language and behaviours that were sometimes



difficult to grasp in comparison to their previous experiences in the health sector. As in any cultural transition, these therapists had to adapt in order to survive.

**Deb:** I think it's just, I think there is a paradigm shift between working in health and working in education. And I've often thought about how to help people make that shift. And I think it's quite scary that they [organisation] leave people [therapists] to do it on their own and not guide them. Because if, I think, you don't help therapists to do that ... it reflects on all of us ... I mean, I know there are things written, but there almost has to be some sort of – like a position statement – “This is where we stand! This is where we collectively agree that we think and do” ... and you almost have to induct people into that through some sort of process ... some sort of, you know, like a course, like, people have to do this 5 day course. ... it's a very sensitive issue because most of the therapists we have are experienced ... in some ways it's almost better to get a [new graduate] and then you can indoctrinate them, it can almost be even more difficult with experienced therapists who have got lots of experience, just to help them make that paradigm shift.

Tension was also evident in this emergent culture, in particular tension between traditional, biomedical perspectives and occupational practice (Hocking, 2003), whereby the focus is on things that people (students) are able to do (occupations) in their day-to-day lives (at school). Furthermore, it was evident that there was a need for a huge attitudinal shift to practice within a different paradigm, one that emphasises occupation-focused intervention and environmental practice in a non-medical setting.

**Yolanda:** A lot of the time, we are working to help people to understand why we work differently and often that continues to be a mismatch ... “Why don't they fix them? What's the therapist doing? Why don't they fix them?”

**Phillipa:** I don't think people can just come in and just do it. It is a big stepping on thing and I really feel sad ... it takes a long time to get to that. And if people aren't taken through the path and they are working in isolation, then they mightn't be sort of joining us on that pathway ... we have a lot to offer, but it's just not that traditional therapy model.

Participants collectively voiced that therapy-specific, contextualised formal induction alongside supervision and mentoring for therapists new to the organisation was required to facilitate the necessary attitudinal shift and transition into the education sector. Their personal and professional values and beliefs linked “who I am” as a practitioner to “what I know” to such an extent that it seemed participants had been drawn to this practice context in which they could express an inclusive, occupation-focused worldview.

## DISCUSSION

Whilst some of the attitudes, values and beliefs revealed in the study were anticipated, such notions are now identified and labelled as *ethos* through the process of systematic research. Without gaining insider perspectives, it was difficult to ascertain what philosophical truths underpinned the work

of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists, what they do, how they do it, and in particular, “why” they practice the way they do. Through this study, the ethos that shapes their particular ways of being who they are was revealed as the practice foundation for Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists. At the heart of this is inclusion philosophy alongside emerging occupational and environmental practice.

However, whilst the shared nature of culture is acknowledged, no two members of a culture have the exact same version of their culture and allowance for differences in perceptions must be made, given that the process of enculturation is individual (Bates & Fratkin, 1999). Indeed cultural variation is viewed as an important aspect of culture and both variation and diversity play significant roles in societal change (Cockerham, 1995). However, little to no variation was evident in what participants revealed as core cultural values and beliefs. Nor was there much variation in what they did in practice (patterns of behaviour). This may be because only a small sample of the most experienced Ministry of Education, Special Education group of therapists was interviewed. Those in the throes of enculturation, that is, new to the work setting, those who had exited the group, and those on the outside who were not employed by the Ministry of Education, Special Education were not interviewed. Including them may have revealed differences in perspective.

Nevertheless, the participants recognised that whilst legislation espouses the rights of all students to access learning opportunities in regular schools, and that the *New Zealand Disability Strategy* (Ministry of Health, 2001) fosters the right to participation and inclusion; this does not mean that students “will” be included in school communities as full and valued members. Indeed, inclusion and inclusive practice go far beyond the mere writing of policies and location of students with disabilities or special education needs in regular classrooms (Mentis, Quinn & Ryba, 2005). These participants recognise that inclusive notions are primarily situated in the attitudes, values, and beliefs of individuals, communities and society as a whole, underpinned by notions of social justice and citizenship, and dependent upon educational structures, policies, processes and practices. Someone has to run up the flag for inclusion and these participants have individually, and collectively, chosen to be that someone. Thus, to work in their practice settings Ministry of Education, Special Education therapists need to adopt this value system.

The ethos that was uncovered in this study is embedded in an organisational culture, which is in turn embedded within key Aotearoa/New Zealand legislative frameworks. We anticipated that the process of enculturation would be strongly evident in what participants said, and indeed it was. The insight gained about the importance of enculturation strongly pointed to the need for attention to be paid to this aspect in the Ministry of Education, Special Education workplace. This would facilitate the attitudinal shift required to leave behind the dominant biomedical culture as therapists transition into working in the regular education

sector, and to counteract some of the tensions that accompany such a shift. This also means that occupational therapy and physiotherapy educators need to pay attention to preparing graduates to practice in non-medical settings such as the regular education sector (Brandenburger-Shasby, 2005; Bundy, 1997).

Once acculturated, collectively shared values and beliefs come to bear on what participants deem as “right” and “good” in their Ministry of Education, Special Education practice lives. Such values and beliefs translate into what are collectively accepted truths by the participants. For example, paramount truths include inclusive education and the fact that students with disabilities and special education needs *are* students. These truths align with an organisational viewpoint and government perspectives, and mirror some of the key messages of the *New Zealand Disability Strategy* (Ministry of Health, 2001). They also reflect many of the notions called for in today’s disability rights and inclusive education discourses (Ballard, 1999, 2004; Kielhofner, 2005; MacArthur & Kelly, 2004; Neilson, 2005; Pollock Prezant & Marshak, 2006; Slee, 2001; Snow, 2004a; Taylor, 2004).

Participants in this study converged in the education sector to settle in a different paradigm. Choosing to displace themselves, they left behind traditional health sector settings and ways of thinking to work in regular schools. That is, to work in a practice context aspiring to the vision of inclusive education; immersed in an organisation whose culture is imbued by government-driven policies, education-focused protocols, and education-focused thinking. In changing practice settings, they have changed much of the philosophical basis of their practice thinking and patterns of behaviour. They have opened themselves to new learnings, events, situations, and innovative ways of working in a non-medical setting.

Now they are physically, culturally and politically situated within the education sector, within an organisational society extolling inclusive, ecological, and collaborative practices. As ardent proponents of collaborative practice they are intensely consultative in their practice behaviours and engaged in the pursuit of contextualised partnerships with their clients, whether student, teacher or family/whānau, doing so for very important reasons. These occupational therapists and physiotherapists act as knowledgeable brokers for inclusion in Aotearoa/New Zealand schools, being re-positioned as community and societal workers. Their ethos, as revealed in this study, reflects this stance. Perhaps they are the new breed of therapist for the new millennium, driven not only by theoretical perspectives, but also by what sits at the heart of their culture: “a student’s (person’s) inclusion”.

**Yolanda:** I think that in five years time we will look back and we will say “That was such an important time”.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the culture of practice of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists to arrive at key insights and meanings about their shared ethos. Such meanings comprise the things that shape and make the group’s “why of who we

are”. As such, they give context and foundation to the very fabric of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists’ and physiotherapists’ practice norms and behaviour patterns.

Inclusion philosophy and inclusive practice permeates Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists’ and physiotherapists’ collective worldview and is manifested in their actions, practice priorities and standards, language and ways of being a Ministry of Education, Special Education therapist. This system of values and beliefs influences the theoretical information they are drawn to, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of enculturation into the inclusion worldview. In addition, the ethos is informed and shaped by the Aotearoa/New Zealand government’s schooling strategies and the special education legislative policy framework.

To this end, two significant considerations arise from the study for workforce development. First, there is a need to implement formal therapy-specific, contextualised induction, supervision and mentoring for therapists new to the organisation. Second, occupational therapy and physiotherapy educators need to prepare graduates to practice in non-medical settings.

To assist these outcomes, the attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists’ and physiotherapists’ practice behaviours when working with students in regular schools are summarised as a set of guiding principles.

- *Practice inclusively:* Learn and apply the principles of inclusive education and inclusion philosophy. Become an inclusion broker, nestled within an ecological approach to school-based practice.
- *Practice collaboratively:* Reflect this way of being in all your consultations, communications, relationships, and teaming. “Walk with” and “talk with others”. Honour the client’s voice, be it the student, teacher, family/whānau, school community, or all of these people.
- *Know the education system:* Know the Aotearoa/New Zealand legislative framework in its entirety. Know each individual school community and school culture. Seek to know what is contextually right for each student.
- *Enable students’ learning:* Think learning in its broadest sense. Work for and enable learning outcomes and learning contexts for students in the context of New Zealand’s school curriculum. Foster, guide, broker and build accessible learning environments for all students.
- *Enable participation:* Enable students to actively and fully participate in their school communities. Foster student belonging, membership and participation in the school community. Emphasise school occupations in context.
- *Advocate the notion of “students being students”:* Students have equal rights and choices alongside their peers. De-emphasise impairment-focused attitudes. Strengthen the notion of children and young people being valued for who they are; as students, people, learners, peers and friends.

And

- Become brokers for societal change: Stand for the vision of Aotearoa/New Zealand as an inclusive, rather than disabling, society.

Finally, in the words of Snow (2004b):

When we think differently, we'll talk differently. When we think and talk differently, we'll act differently. When we act differently, we'll be creating change in ourselves and our communities. In the process, the lives of people with disabilities will be changed as well. (p. 2)

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## Carolyn Simmons Carlsson

Carolyn Simmons Carlsson has worked part-time with the Ministry of Education, Special Education (GSE) since 1998. She is one of the first group of Ministry of Education, Special Education occupational therapists and physiotherapists who found themselves confronted with the challenge of enacting the principles of Special Education 2000 and embedding therapy practice within an education model. Prior to this, she worked in a range of paediatric settings, both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the UK. When not at GSE, Carolyn is Professional Leader: Occupational Therapy for physical health services, Auckland District Health Board, and provides supervision to therapists. She graduated with a Master of Health Science (Hons) from Auckland University of Technology, March 2007, and is currently interested in continuing to explore and articulate the theory and application of therapy services for children and young people to support students' presence, participation and learning within their chosen school communities.

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# Parental Suggestions for Facilitating Acceptance and Understanding of Autism

Bernie Wastney  
Gayle Te Kooro-Baker  
Carolyn McPeak



## ABSTRACT

This article contains the transcript of a session one mother ran in her child's class. The aim of the session was to give class members a better understanding of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in general and of her son in particular. The effectiveness of her approach is evident in the follow-up stories children wrote and in the experiences this mother recounts. Included as an appendix is a questionnaire developed by three Māori parents of children with ASD. These questions were used to assist them in selecting schools to meet their children's special and cultural needs.

## Storied Experience

### Keywords

*Asperger syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, culturally appropriate strategies, inclusion practices, Māori culture, parent participation, parent school relationship, peer acceptance, school choice, whānau.*

## INTRODUCTION

All parents are hopeful that their child's school years will be both happy and successful. Many also assume that this will happen without a huge input on their behalf. For some parents of children with ASD this assumption is a luxury. Their experience has taught them that in order for their child to cope with even the simplest daily tasks, they need to invest a great deal of time and effort into ensuring this happens. Even in the best of schools children with ASD may not be readily accepted by their classmates. To help facilitate acceptance and understanding of her son Michael when he first started school, his mother Bernie explained his disability and strengths to his new classmates. In following years, Bernie consulted with Michael's new teachers and together they considered whether there were children who were puzzled or frightened by Michael's behaviour and whether the new class would benefit from Bernie talking to them. Following is the transcript of a talk Bernie gave to Michael's year 4 class. Michael had an important role to play in this session, demonstrating his special abilities and unique ways of communicating.

## SOME LAMPS ARE AUTISTIC

Props used:

- 2 table lamps (identical looking but one plug in and one touch lamp)
- Books with characters that Michael could identify (to show off his skills)

- ANZAC biscuits that Michael had made (to show off his skills)
- Māori reader book (Māori language book read by Nan)
- Teacher Aide who used sign language to children
- Extension cord and double plug
- Reading Master books that Michael loves and knows.

Kia ora everybody, my name is Bernie and I am Michael's Mum, and this is my Aunty who is going to read us a story later, but you can call her Nan, Say "kia ora Nan", and of course you all know Michael's teacher aide Mrs C and she's going to tell us a story.

Let the children see that in their class some children can do some things but not do other things.

There are some people with autism who can do some things, but not do other things.

I wanted to speak to you all today about why I think Michael is so special.

Michael has autism, but before I talk about him, I'd like to know a little bit about you.

- Q. Hands up all those children who can ride a bike.  
(wait for response)
- Q. Hands up who can't ride a bike.  
(wait for response)  
Oh, there are some children that can ride bikes and some children that can't.
- Q. Hands up all those children who can do a cartwheel.  
(wait for response)
- Q. Hands up who can't do a cartwheel.  
(wait for response)  
Oh, cartwheels are hard to do and there are some children who can't do them.
- Q. Hands up all those children who can swim.  
(wait for response)
- Q. Hands up who can't swim.  
(wait for response)  
Great, most of you can swim, but there are some who can't.
- Q. Hands up all those children who can tell me what 10 x 10 equals.  
What a clever class!



Q. Hands up all those children who know what 25679 x 29309 equals.

Well even I can't do that, can you Nan?

Can you [Teacher's name]?

Can you [Teacher Aide's name]?

Well, none of us can, but do you know there is a boy with autism in our city who is the same age as Michael who would be able to answer that question straight away without even using a calculator? Yet this boy can't tie his shoelaces and he can't talk and he doesn't like it when you touch him, and doesn't like it when you talk to him.

Michael has something called autism. Who knows what autism is?

Well everyone who has autism is different.

Some people with autism can talk, and some can't talk.

Some people with autism can understand what people are saying, and some can't.

Some people with autism can read and some can't, and some can swim and some can't.

Do you know that even the best doctors and scientists can't agree on what autism is, or why some children have autism?

### Lamp Experiment

Lamp experiment may help explain that even though the lamps look the same, they work differently. An opportunity to explain why Michael needs a teacher aide, who touches or prompts him to help him work and why they use chippies or special toys as positive reinforcement to encourage work or co-operation.

Sometimes I wonder if it is like a lamp, let's try an experiment.

Q. What happens when I plug in this one?  
(plug in first lamp – plain one)

That's right, when I plug it in, the lamp turns on.

Q. And what happens when I plug in this one?  
(plug in touch lamp)

Oh no, it didn't work even though I plugged it in, I know, let's try touching it.  
(Touch lamp)

Wow, this lamp turned on when we touched it, it just needed some help to get going.

Inside the first lamp there is a set of wires, and when you plug in the lamp and turn on the switch the wires join and the light goes on.

Nobody is really sure, but I think in Michael's brain, it's kind of like the second lamp that doesn't go, even when you plug it in, so maybe the wires in Michael's brain just aren't quite touching and they just need some help to get it going. Michael is kind of like that, his teacher and teacher aide sometimes have to touch him or say something that helps him to switch on.

Q. Has everyone seen Michael's teacher aide give him chippies? Why do you think that is?

She uses them to encourage Michael to do things, she might say, "Michael, finish off this work, then you can have a chippie".

That's similar to what your teacher says. Sometimes they might say, "Finish off your writing, then you can have a snack from your bag, or when the room is tidy, you can go to lunch."

At home, your Mum might say, "Eat up your dinner, meat or vegies, then you can have dessert or ice cream."

Show children some of the things that Michael is good at and some of his special interests and simple ways that the parents or the teacher aide use to communicate with him.

I like to think that people with autism are really special. There are some things they can do, and there are some things they can't do, just like most of you here.

Well, there are some things that Michael can do, and some things that Michael can't do.

Q. Who can tell some of the things Michael can do...?

When Michael wants his teacher aide to go with him he can say "Up" or "Come me."

Sometimes you can get him to do things by saying "Do this!" "Look!"

(demonstrate Michael copying, touching nose, clapping, blowing kiss etc.)

Shall I show you some of the other things that Michael can do?

Michael loves to help do the baking, and he made these beautiful biscuits last night.

We are going to leave them here for everyone to have for morning tea.

Michael likes to watch Barney, and he knows the words to every song that has been on the every Barney TV programme or video. Does anyone know a song that is on Barney?

(Demonstrate Michael finishing off a song that we start to sing)

There are some other things that Michael knows, and we're not sure why he likes them but he does.

Q. Who knows what this is?  
(Hold up book showing Cats – Abyssinian)

Yes it is a cat, yes it is a brown cat. What breed is this cat?  
... Watch this!

(Demonstrate Michael naming all the breeds of cats in the Reading Master book)

He also knows lots of names of tropical birds & New Zealand birds and African animals.

And he knows all of the pictures in this book (similar to PECS, the Picture Exchange Communication System where children show a picture to indicate what they need).

(Show Michael's communication book and open to the "I need a break" page). He shows his teacher aide this picture when he needs a break, or if he is hungry he shows his teacher or teacher aide his lunchbox card.

Explain to children about the sensory issues that people with autism have. Michael has sensitive ears so the blackboard experiment will give an unpleasant experience for them, similar to what Michael feels when he has sore ears or is anxious, and give some examples of how they can help Michael.

Q. Do you see Michael covering his ears? A lot of children with autism have really sensitive ears. Listen.. (demonstrate scratching down the blackboard with fingernails)

Q. How did that make you feel?  
(Responses: "Oooo, that hurt my teeth" and "Oooo, it made my whole body feel yuk")

Some people don't like that sound, and that's how we think it is for Michael sometimes. A grown up man with Autism once told me that sometimes the pain he feels in his ears is like when you go to the dentist and they have to drill your teeth, and sometimes they hit a nerve. Has that ever happened to anyone? That really hurts!

Q. Does anyone have any ideas about how we can help Michael when he has sore ears?

Instead of the teacher clapping to get your attention in the classroom, and you clapping back, maybe she can put her arm up, and then you can put your arm up to show her that you're nice and quiet and listening.

Read a story in Māori and a sentence using sign language. It is unlikely that the children will be able to understand what is being said, which is similar to what Michael experiences. Give examples of how we can communicate with him and make up a name for Michael's language.

Sometimes Michael makes loud noises so he doesn't have to hear the noise that other people are making. Do you sometimes hear him? At other times Michael makes noises because he's happy.

Q. Does anyone understand what Michael is saying?  
(Responses were.. "Not really"?)

Let me introduce you to Nan, she is going to read you a story, and at the end of the story I would like to you tell me what the story was about, so listen carefully.

Nan reads a story in Māori

Q. Did anyone understand what Nan was saying?  
Why not? Could you not hear her properly? I heard her.

Now (the teacher aide) is going to speak to you in a different way. When she is finished I want you to tell me what she said.

The teacher aide demonstrates signing, Good morning children, my name is R/A/C/H/E/L.

Q. Did anyone understand what she was saying?  
Q. Couldn't you see her properly? I could see her. Why can't you tell me what she said?  
(Response: "Because she was doing stuff we didn't know")  
That's because she also spoke in another language, it's called signing.

Sometimes that's how it is for Michael. He can see your lips moving, but all he can hear is "blah blah blah". He just doesn't understand what you are saying.

Q. Does anyone understand Michael when he is talking?  
Maybe sometimes you could play a game and guess what Michael might be saying when he is making a noise.

At home when Michael is talking, sometimes he likes it when I copy him: he looks at me, and sometimes touches my lips to correct me.

Mostly, he likes it when I talk to him in a nice soft voice, and sometimes he talks back to me in his own little language (Demonstrate with Michael).

Q. Does anyone know what language is Michael talking?  
I don't know what it is called either but shall we make up a name for it...

The name of some languages are Chinese, Tongan, Fijian, Japanese. What name shall we make up for Michael's language?

(Response: After much debate class decided on "Mike a nese")

When Michael was four years old, he had a book written about him and his sister Samantha. It's called *Samantha's Brother* (show book) by Julie Ellis.

My friend wrote it, and now its in lots of schools in New Zealand and Australia and America (Leave behind for them to read).

Thank you so much for inviting me into your class today, I'm glad that Michael is in this class. I think Michael is special and I think you are all really special too.

Thanks to Nan, teacher and teacher aide and Michael.  
Goodbye.

## WHAT A BIG DIFFERENCE A SMALL PRESENTATION TO MICHAEL'S CLASSROOM PEERS MADE

Bernie reports:

The children at Michael's school have always been supportive of him. Our presentation gave them the confidence to interact with Michael and to support him in very practical ways. An added bonus was that many of the children spoke to their parents about Michael. The outcome was that smiles and eye contact towards me as the parent are now more forthcoming.

Some examples are:

1. The following day after our presentation during a lunch break a police car went past the school with its siren on. Michael stood with his hands covering his ears and a girl in his class came behind him and covered his hands with hers saying "It's OK Michael, it's nearly gone now".
2. When Michael was sitting during a break, three girls came running around the corner then stopped came back and stood in front of Michael and said "Hi Michael, say Hi" to which he replied, "Hi." After this acknowledgement the girls continued on with their activity.
3. When Michael discovered that he liked standing in the middle of the rugby game at lunchtime, the boys would stop and pass Michael the ball. Sometimes he would drop it, and sometimes he would pick it up and run with it (like Forest Gump and not return it!). The boys realised if Michael was to play with them they would need two balls, so they could continue playing if Michael took their ball from the field.
4. We recently took Michael to the school disco and after he finished his packet of chips he went up to another parent, pulled down her hand and gave her the empty packet and skipped off. The parent's shocked face soon turned into a smile after her son ran up to her and said, "hey Mum, that's Michael."

The effect of Bernie's presentation is evident in the stories Michael's classmates wrote following Bernie's visit.

#### **Michael's Story by A**

Today Michael's Mum came and her name is Bernie and we were talking about Michael to see how we could help him. We can play games with him and show him things to do with people and to respect Michael and teach him and we could have a running game or show him how to jump the tyres and Michael's Mum brought some lamps to show us how they work and one was a touch lamp.

#### **Michael's Story by B**

Today Michael's Mum and Nan talked about Michael. How he has autism. If you want Michael to do something give Michael a chip. Michael's Nan read us a story and did you know that some lamps are autistic? Did you know that Michael's ears hurt like a drill in your teeth and did you know that Michael can cook? He likes to cook in Room 5.

#### **Michael's Story by C**

Today Bernie and Nan and Mrs C came in. Bernie talked to us about the problem that Michael has and it starts with A. It's called autism. He has a different brain than us and there are more kids at school with the same thing. Nan also read us a story in Māori. Michael doesn't like light. He also does not like loud noises so we need to turn our voices down. Bernie said Michael is special, then when they started to leave Bernie said that we were special as well.

#### **Michael's Story by D**

Today Michael's Mum came to school to talk to Room 2 about Michael when he is hungry he looks in his little book.

#### **Michael's Story by E**

Today Bernie and Nan came to school to talk to us about Michael and Michael knows the names of lots of cats.

#### **Michael's Story by F**

Today Michael's Mum and Nan came and talked about Michael and Mrs C was doing sign language. Michael's Nan was reading us a story and Michael's Mum brought two lamps and she turned it on and it wasn't on but when she touched it, it went on. Michael was biting his knees and Mrs C brought a black book and Michael's Mum said when Mrs C takes Michael outside she takes the black book with her and then Mrs C gives the book to him and he shows a picture and then she takes him there.

#### **Michael's Story by G**

Hi, we are room 2. Autism is different in some people. X had autism but Michael has the most.

#### **Michael's Story by H**

Bernie was telling us what autism is, she said Michael has autism. Well I think it is when you can not hear. Michael is a kind boy. He is my friend. He is a nice boy. Sometimes he likes to cover his ears. Michael is a mystery to the scientists and they are trying to find out what autism is, they don't know what it is yet.

Yes, what a big difference a small presentation can make!

### **APPENDIX 1**

Choosing the right school is a particular concern for many parents of children with ASD because of the additional help their children require. This was a concern Bernie faced a number of years ago. To help her choose the best school for Michael she prepared a set of questions to ask teachers at the schools she visited. These questions centred around the areas that were of major concern and interest to her and relevance to Michael. She explained that some questions had a higher weighting than others – safety for Michael was a high priority. In making the final decision about which school was the "best fit" for her son, Bernie carefully weighed up the information she had gathered. She took into account the answers to her questions, what she had observed, the teachers' attitudes and their willingness to accept and accommodate Michael. She did not expect to find the "perfect" school, but hoped to find one that would seriously consider her concerns and work towards providing the best possible learning environment for her son.

Since then two other Māori parents have helped Bernie refine her original questionnaire. These parents were concerned not only that their children's special needs would be adequately provided for, but also that these needs would be met in a culturally appropriate way in an environment that valued and supported Māori cultural beliefs, values and practices. Below is the latest version of the questionnaire. It is shared in the hopes that it will be useful to other Māori parents who have children with ASD. It is also hoped that the questionnaire will alert educators to a number of parental priorities and concerns.



### Questions Regarding School and School Policies

1. Does this school have a special needs unit?
2. If so, what percentage of my child's day is likely to be spent in the unit and what percentage of time will they be mainstreamed?
3. What are the benefits of having a special needs unit?
4. If my child is 100% mainstreamed, what provisions do you have in place for his specific learning needs, sensory issues or behaviours?
5. What experience do your staff have in dealing with children on the autism spectrum?
6. How many children with my child's level of autism, has your current staff dealt with?
7. What type of funding does your school receive for special needs children and how is it used?
8. If my child is classified as having very high or high needs (ORRS funded) how will the funding he attracts be distributed and how many teacher aide hours will be allocated?
9. If my child does not receive any ORRS funding, how will the school deal with? Their specific learning needs, sensory issues, social issues and behaviours?
10. Who will be responsible for my child while he is at your school- e.g., do you have someone who will become familiar with him and his specific needs, and be his advocate especially as he transitions from year to year, or will this responsibility rest on his new teacher each year?
11. Will my child attend school full time?
  - a) What are the advantages of coming to this school? What are your strengths?
  - b) Can you see any disadvantages in coming to this school?
12. Is there representation for children with special needs on the Board of Trustees?

### Questions Regarding Cultural Issues

13. What Māori programmes or teaching does this school offer my child?
14. How many Māori teachers or teacher aides are there in this school?
15. Are the teachers, teacher aides, specialists and therapists who work within this school environment knowledgeable or sensitive to Māori cultural needs/tikanga?
16. Is the school open to input or increasing their awareness of Māori cultural needs?
17. Is there Māori representation on the Board of Trustees and PTA?
18. What relationship does the school have with the Māori Community and how is this relationship maintained?
19. Do you have a kapa haka group in this school, and is my child able to join?
20. Will there be a pōwhiri to welcome my child and our whānau into this school?
21. Is there an expectation that my child will participate in all activities in regards to our Māori culture? (e.g. pōwhiri, kapa haka, marae visit, tangi)

22. If my child needs assistance in toileting, dressing or showering, will you make allowances regarding physical handling which is sensitive to cultural needs?
23. What is your policy regarding use, storage and administering of Rongoa? (Māori medicine)
24. Are your school and your staff prepared to cater for or make allowances for our cultural needs in regards to karakia (prayer) before eating?
25. Who is my child likely to have as his teacher aide? What is their experience and training relevant to Māori and ASD?
26. Are my whānau able to attend IEPs and other school meetings and if so, do you have the facilities to cater for them?

### Questions Regarding Learning Outcomes

27. Are there any particular programmes you have in place specifically for children with ASD, and how successful are they?
28. What programmes are you likely to implement for my child?
29. Is there ongoing training or professional development about ASD? Who is likely to participate in this training?
30. What type of specialists do you use in this school and how often do you meet with them?
31. Will my child be included in all the school activities?
32. What alternatives are in place if my child is unable to attend any of the school activities/outings?

### Questions Regarding Family/Whānau

33. Do you encourage parental input, particularly regarding behavioural issues and learning outcomes?
34. Do parents have the opportunity to meet with the teacher aide/s who are likely to be spending the most time with my child?
35. What protocols will you use for communication between the teacher, teacher aide, parents and whānau?
36. If parents have a complaint, what procedures do you have in place for hearing these complaints?
37. If a programme has been successful at home, is the school open to adapting their school programmes in light of this programme?

### Questions Regarding School Environment

38. Who will be with my child at intervals and lunchtimes, and where is this likely to be?
39. If my child needs assistance in toileting, dressing or showering:
  - a) Do you have suitable facilities?
  - b) What is your policy regarding physical handling of my child?
  - c) Who will be responsible for the above?
40. How many children are in my child's class or special needs unit? What are the class sizes likely to be as he/she progresses?

### Other Things a Parent may Need to Observe and Consider:

41. Geographical placement of the school: For example, is my child going to be at risk if the school is on a main road, or intersection? If my child is considered a runner, how many exits are there to the school, and what are the potential risks in the neighbourhood if he manages to escape?
42. If my child is a climber, are the fences high enough, or are there apparatus that can be used as a ladder?
43. If my child puts everything in his/her mouth, are there any obvious poisons or poisonous plants which are within my child's reach?
44. When potential hazards are identified by parents/whānau, are the school prepared to make necessary alterations to suit my child's needs?

### AUTHOR PROFILES

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Bernie Wastney is the mother of Michael who has severe autism. She has read extensively in the area of ASD and is an active parent advocate. She is a trustee of the PAI 4 ASD Trust (Promotion of Acceptance and Inclusion of Autism Spectrum Disorder – Te Hapaitanga o te Whakaaetanga Trust). Her iwi affiliation is Ngāti Porou and Kahungunu.

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**Carolyn McPeak**



#### **Carolyn McPeak**

Carolyn McPeak is the mother of an adult son with Asperger syndrome. She was the founding Chairperson of the Autistic Association branch in the Manawatu. Tribal affiliation is Ngāti Raukawa (Ngāti Huri). Carolyn currently works for Supportlinks as a Needs Assessor/Coordinator.

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# Forty or Fifty Something

## What we are like at mid-life

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### ABSTRACT

Many teachers and human service workers are 40-50 years of age and this paper explores the formative influences, and the developmental characteristics, of workers who are presently middle-aged. This leads onto an examination of the importance of relationships and work to mid-lifers. In the concluding section of the paper, there is some consideration of the significance of having an older workforce for the success of the current policy innovations in special education.

### Position Paper

#### Keywords

*Family work relationship, human development, labour market, lifestyle, professional standards, special education, teachers.*

### INTRODUCTION

Many teachers and special educators are now in their forties and fifties, as are the members of a number of other professions. For instance, the average age of state primary and secondary teachers is presently 44, while social workers and nurses have a mean age of 45, and most psychologists are over 45 years of age. The ageing of these workforces has major implications for the continuing availability of social services in this country, and particularly as the move towards a global employment market continues apace. However, in this paper I would like to address the salient developmental features of middle age, a period that is frequently understood to span 40-65 years, as it is described in standard human development texts. With so many educators in their forties and fifties it is instructive to consider the abilities, aptitudes and other characteristics of this group in much the same way that we think of these things for the child populations that they serve. It is also important to speculate on the significance of an older workforce to the success of new policy initiatives in special education.

### COMMON FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Cohort effects are a critical consideration in any developmental study because the historical period in which we grow up can have such a bearing on the people that we become. Today's mid-lifers were, arguably, massively impacted upon by World War II. They experienced the residual conformity of the war years, the startling and multifaceted rebellion of the 1960s and '70s, and the subsequent adjustments and other developments that typified the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the post-war years teenage pregnancy was unexceptional rather than

indicative of some dysfunction, and there was a "right age" for most other life events. The overt authoritarianism in New Zealand at this time was probably also linked to the pervading egalitarianism, and it possibly explains why so many of us know quite a bit about guilt.

Many people who became parents in the late 1940s and '50s were concerned that their children proceed to higher education; they wanted degrees in the family but not necessarily the freedom of thought that can come with them. By today's standards, the baby-boomers have known financial restraints, as most families initially had little in the way of "discretionary funds", but they were a favoured group as well. A single income supported a household, School Certificate was an unquestioned rite of passage, there were virtually no university fees, undergraduate degrees translated into jobs, and for those who chose Government employment, there was an excellent superannuation scheme.

It's a popular adage that if you can remember the 1960s you probably weren't there but this preoccupation with particular manifestations of the age (sometimes collectively referred to as "pill, pot, and porn") can obscure the unprecedented social change of this period. Many of the leaders of today experienced and participated in the early environmental movement, the claims of gay rights, opposition to the conflict in Vietnam, contention over abortion, and the increasing emancipation of women. Knowing about these involvements may help us to understand their independence of mind, their valuing of choice and experimentation, and other aspects of their belief systems. From a sociological perspective, the developments altered our conceptions of work and family and it is likely, as Kail and Cavanaugh (2004) contend, that social change has generally been faster than our ability to think through the associated issues.

The 1980s and '90s saw some of the consequences of revolutionary change, and especially of the increased opportunities for women. There were marked increases in cohabitation, divorce, and single parenting, and the advent of what one authority describes as "conjugal succession" or "serial marriage" (Vander Zanden, 2000). For baby boomers, relationships today can sometimes appear conditional, with the emphasis being on the extent to which other people meet their present needs and help them to grow personally. The contexts in which relationships are now transacted, and specifically the workplace, also seem to have become more complicated and intense, with higher expectations and greater reliance on verbal and affective abilities.

## THE DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT: BODY, MIND, AND PERSONALITY

The realisation that the body is deteriorating is unavoidable in middle age: There are just too many signs. Textbook writer John Santrock (2008) says 'Since a youthful appearance is stressed in our culture, many individuals whose hair is graying, whose skin is wrinkling, whose bodies are sagging, and whose teeth are yellowing strive to make themselves look younger' (p. 531). Women who are concerned about facial attractiveness are at a relative disadvantage to men because in women the oil-producing glands that combat wrinkles stop producing some ten years earlier (Hoffman, Paris, & Hall, 1994). It is undoubtedly unfair but some signs of ageing in a man can be considered to enhance his attractiveness whereas these signs in a woman are perceived as unattractive. Both sexes are more prone to put on weight as metabolism slows down. Indeed, in mid-life a powerful connection can appear between food ingested and permanent weight gain. The old adage can become depressingly true: "A second on the lips and forever on the hips".

On reflection, physical change and development in middle age is associated with a series of sobering paradoxes. In our early years, time drags and adult status seems to take forever to attain. Now time flies and additional signs of ageing continually take us by surprise. When we meet an age mate whom we have not seen for a while we can be shocked by his or her appearance, and it is a grim realisation that we probably appear old to them as well. There is little consolation in the fact that ageing is inevitable and universal since it affects us personally.

The majority of men and women at mid-life are concerned about developing health problems. It is the time when we fear death the most, and this anxiety may be provoked by the passing of a parent or another older relative. However, health is generally good during these years and with the extended life span a woman might expect to live half of her adult life after menopause (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007). Middle age gives us insights into what we will be like in old age and it is still possible through exercise and diet to influence the quality of the remainder of our lives.

Drewery and Bird (2004) caution us against accepting a young/old dualism, and an unbalanced emphasis on the biological changes of midlife can tend to support such a dichotomy. People compensate for physical losses and, according to a cognitive perspective, many mature adults are in their prime. The English novelist George Eliot said that it is never too late to be what we might have been. This encouraging sentiment is true in parts. It is highly unlikely that a mid-lifer could make the All Blacks or the Silver Ferns but it is fairly probable that they will practice their profession or trade more adroitly.

Kail and Cavanaugh (2004) describe the two defining attributes of middle age cognition as enhanced expertise and the ability to solve practical problems. Expertise is dependent on accumulated knowledge, which allows those who have it to bypass the many intermediate steps that the novice must take. In effect, thinking strategies and professional knowledge merge, or are encapsulated, and this can make it difficult for the expert to explain how he or she arrives at an

interpretation or solution. The expert case worker just knows what is happening for a particular child or family and what assistance is needed.

Practical problem solving ability is also essential to successful practitioner performance in the social services. Take any day of the working week; it will involve continual reprioritising of tasks, maintaining relationships with others who have different interests to serve the needs of common clients, balancing ethical, organisational, and more immediately human demands, and a host of other equally complex and challenging tasks. There is no one correct approach or answer to these sorts of work engagements but theorising and research in human development suggests that people at mid-life more often take the more optimal choices and actions.

Expertise and practical problem solving ability can be difficult to measure in organisational contexts. For instance, they do not show up on intelligence tests or most aptitude scales. It may be that the importance of problem solving, advanced expertise, and institutional memory (which is related to the personal capacities) only really becomes apparent when these functions are threatened or diminished, and when workplace mistakes and complaints multiply. At the least, it is interesting that there is an evidence-based case for having a human service workforce that contains mature practitioners.

The domains of human development are closely interconnected and cognitive awareness of physical decline can have significant implications for mid-life personality and socioemotional development. Carl Jung suggested that we respond to the prospect of death by turning inwards and by reflection, and it is a fact that for many people there is a reawakening of religious faith in their mid-fifties. Erik Erikson, another psychodynamic theorist, took an opposing tack and contended that we attempt to deal with our own mortality by reaching out and furthering the interests of succeeding generations. This generativity, which can contrast with self-preoccupation and stagnation, reflects a fundamental belief in the human enterprise (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004).

How much do we change at midlife? It is probable that most of us do assume new priorities but the essence of who we are remains intact. Some stage theorists propose that there is a universal crisis in middle adulthood but this has not been confirmed by longitudinal studies. Indeed, it is usually more accurate to think of mid-life *consciousness* rather than *crisis* (Santrock, 2008). As our physical bodies change, and as the situational demands that we are subjected to alter, we endeavour to obtain new adaptations between ourselves and the world. In turn, at middle age we need to revise the visions that we have of our various personal identities (e.g., career, leisure, relationships, and spirituality) as we did in early adulthood, and as we will have to do again in old age.

The stability-change issue is probably of less interest to readers than the question of whether mid-life is a good time to be alive. However, the human development texts give mixed answers on this. The dominant view is that it is a highly rewarding and satisfying period. After age 50, in particular, there is unparalleled productivity and



accomplishment for both women and men. Nevertheless, there are also numerous stage-specific pressures (many of which have financial implications) and middle age is often our most stressful time. Interpersonal tension is the most salient stressor that people over forty experience (Santrock, 2008) and, as has been suggested above, this aspect of their daily lives could be intensifying.

### THE IMPERATIVES OF ADULTHOOD: RELATIONSHIPS

Good social relationships are not additional or discretionary aspects of a satisfying and prudent life. For instance, Papalia et al (2007) observe that 'Relationships are the most important key to well-being' (p. 603). Similarly, Vander Zanden (2000) states that 'Close and meaningful social relationships play a vital part in human health and happiness' (p. 500). Women typically have a far better understanding of this than men do and they often contribute much more to the maintenance of the relationships they participate in. Middle-aged mothers are kinkeepers who arrange family celebrations and ensure family members remain in contact. Women make special investments in their relationships with their partners, with their mothers, with their daughters, with their siblings, and with their friends. Apparently, the present generation of mid-life women is the first group to give equal regard to same sex friendships as to heterosexual attachments (Vander Zanden, 2000). Perhaps in keeping with a better appreciation of relationships, women end unsatisfactory associations more readily than men.

An issue for many middle-aged women, and to a lesser extent for middle-aged men, is that they are simply surrounded by too many demanding relationships. According to Vander Zanden (2000), the average American woman will devote 17 years to raising children and 18 years to providing assistance for aged parents. These commitments frequently coincide, and hence mid-lifers are often referred to as the "sandwich generation". There is now also a tendency for adult children to return to live with their parents after completing their education, or after a relationship breaks up, and this inevitably compromises the privacy of both parties. Approximately fifty percent of young adults return to their parents' home at some point in the United States, and we are likely to see more of this in New Zealand, if difficulties of first home ownership continue. Interestingly, an adult son or daughter is much more likely to become "a boomerang kid" when his or her parents are in good health and where they continue to do the bulk of the household tasks (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004).

Relationships with children and grandchildren are very important to middle-aged people. For example, Ryff and colleagues (1994) found that parents' well-being at mid-life is closely related to how they think that their adult children have turned out (cited by Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004). Nevertheless, it is a "developmental task" for mature parents to accept their older children for who they are and not allow earlier hopes and dreams to compromise current relationships. Significantly, research has also found that the launching of adult children, and the consequent "empty nest", is not a problem for most parents and, in fact, it is associated with feelings of freedom and with increases in marital satisfaction (Santrock, 2008).

Grandparenthood is usually an exciting and a meaningful role for mid-lifers but whether it transpires depends on the inclinations of sons and daughters. From an academic perspective, there are all sorts of interesting aspects about grandparenting. For instance, it is one of the few situations where our society permits cross-age touching. Contemporary lifestyles contain special challenges for grandparenting and included here is the greater mobility of parents, threats to the grandparent/grandchild relationship through a son or daughter's divorce, the acquisition of step-grandchildren by a remarriage, and the possibility of grandparents becoming custodial caregivers.

### THE IMPERATIVES OF ADULTHOOD: WORK

Work is a self-defining activity, as evidenced by the fact that when people first meet there are often questions about occupations. Vander Zanden (2000) says that 'For many people, work is a search for meaning – making sense of the world, themselves, and others by giving a sense of order to what might otherwise be a very unstructured existence' (p. 514). As a cohort, today's mid-lifers have had a lot to cope with in terms of changes to the workplace. When many of them began, a career and a job appointment were often for the duration of a person's working life. Organisational restructuring changed that and it is now seen as enterprising to change jobs, rather than being indicative of an inability to settle as it may once have been. Other significant changes in work include a greater priority being given to interpersonal aspects, the advent of computers, the need to continually upgrade job skills, and new workplace values, such as a willingness to question authority and an expectation that work will be fulfilling.

There is a strong body of research which shows that job satisfaction increases as we age and that older adults feel better about their jobs than younger adults (Vander Zanden, 2000). Interestingly, many men are less committed to their work in their fifties while some women seem to develop a "post-menopausal zest", as Margaret Mead defined it (cited by Drewery & Bird, 2004), and become more involved in work. For other women and men at mid-life there is significant occupational stress, alienation, and burnout. This is especially common in the caring professions and its effects can be devastating on an individual's personal and family life. Among workers generally, involvement in leisure activities is an important way of dealing with stress. Mid-life can be an opportunity to pick up new leisure interests and these activities can also function as a bridge into retirement.

### CONCLUSION

Today's mid-lifers were the first television generation and as a group they have evolved distinctive tastes and inclinations in everything from socialising and entertaining to deodorants and (more recently) appearance medicine. Some members of the cohort can have difficulty accepting physical ageing but, in an increasingly age-irrelevant society, 40 has become the new 30, and 50 years of age now has many of the connotations of being 40 a little while ago. Many people in middle age have enhanced cognitive competencies and, in terms of personality development, it is a time for looking back and looking forward and for meaning making. The Freudian injunctions to love and to work contain the sources of many of our greatest satisfactions and of our deepest

sorrows. It is important that there is understanding of the experiences and preferences, and of the developmental domains and imperatives of middle age. Forty- and fifty-year-olds predominate in teaching and the social services. They are the “establishment” of our society and they are as deserving of study as school students or any other client group.

There are also strong organisational imperatives in special education to continue to listen to the voices of the many 40-65 year-old psychologists, speech and language therapists, early intervention teachers, resource teachers of learning and behaviour, and other occupational groups. As we know, it is the intention of the Ministry of Education’s (2006) *Better Outcomes for Children* to improve services for young people by instituting a nationally consistent, evidence-based, approach by 2011. A very real problem is that the older generations who predominate in special education have participated in seemingly endless change, they have witnessed many wasted opportunities (like Behaviour Education Support Teams), and they have suffered in the trivialisation of innovation, in schemes such as open plan offices. It seems reasonable, in this age of accountability, that administrators should be expected to consult closely with middle-aged staff, and be required to provide the resources to ensure that their maturity, generativity, expertise, and practical problem solving abilities are used to full advantage. Otherwise, only superficial changes could be achieved in special education and the hopes for better outcomes are unlikely to be realised.

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# “We Know What You Need ...” and other Misconceptions about Māori Learners<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper challenges some of the ill-informed and misleading assumptions made about Māori students and their whānau, and about Māori teachers and education professionals. In particular it examines four prominent assumptions that impact on Māori, namely:

We are all New Zealanders; We know all about Māori students and praise; We know what whānau needs are, and how to meet them; and we know what an effective partnership with Māori looks like.

It is argued that non-Māori need to invest more time and energy into gaining an understanding of the worldviews and lived experiences of their Māori colleagues, students and whānau they work with. They also need to better understand how taken-for-granted Western European worldviews impact upon Māori. Deeper understanding of both issues will enable non-Māori to build close personal as well as professional relationships with Māori, and so avoid forming and acting upon untested assumptions about “Māori needs” and how they should be met.

## Research

### Keywords

*Culturally appropriate strategies, inclusive education, Māori students, parent school relationship, positive reinforcement, Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour, teacher development.*

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper the authors draw on their personal and professional experiences and research to identify four prominent, ill-informed assumptions that impact on Māori.

These are:

- “We are all New Zealanders”.
- “We know all about Māori students and praise”.
- “We know what whānau needs are, and how to meet them”.
- “We know what an effective partnership with Māori looks like”.

## “WE ARE ALL NEW ZEALANDERS”

This is a favourite positioning statement oft used by politicians. At a superficial level the statement is true, in that there are many different peoples, from different cultural backgrounds now living and working in New Zealand, and regarding New Zealand as home. However, there is a sub-text to “we are all New Zealanders”, and that is an assumption that “we are all the same.” Such assumptions marginalise and minimise difference. Māori hold a unique and Treaty-defined position as tāngata whenua.<sup>2</sup> Māori language, cultural values and practices are connected to this land in a way that is different from those of other peoples living here. Similarly, the social structures of whānau-hapū-iwi-waka<sup>3</sup> support individual and collective identities among Māori that are different from the individual and collective identities of other New Zealanders. An assumption of sameness can obscure our understanding of difference: in this case, the importance of Māori beliefs, values and preferred ways of thinking and acting for the identity, wellbeing and achievement of Māori in their own country. An assumption of sameness can lead to trivialising and disrespect for the knowledge bases, languages, preferred pedagogies and lived experiences of Māori New Zealanders. Emphasising sameness can lead also to moving attention away from questions like: “Who, and what needs to change if better educational outcomes for Māori are to be achieved?” Further, emphasising sameness can lend support to assumptions that there is little non-Māori need to learn or understand about Māori and that there is little need to change the way non-Māori position themselves in relation to Māori.

In sharp contrast to this was the strong desire of the reference group of Māori kaumātua<sup>4</sup> and special education professionals who advised the universities consortium on the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) training programme. Knowing that the vast majority of RTLb would be non-Māori, the reference group wanted this programme content to represent Te Ao Māori<sup>5</sup> faithfully in terms of knowledge and pedagogy, and to respect the mana<sup>6</sup> and the wairua<sup>7</sup> of Māori students.

<sup>1</sup> Summarised version of an invited Keynote Address, Ministry of Education, Special Education National Leadership Conference, Wellington, New Zealand, January 24, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> People of the land, original inhabitants

<sup>3</sup> Extended family, subtribe, tribe, canoe

<sup>4</sup> Elders

<sup>5</sup> The Māori world

<sup>6</sup> prestige, influence, authority

<sup>7</sup> spirit, spirituality

The programme began with what was, for many non-Māori RTLB, a first look into a living and contemporary Māori language and culture, containing different views and positions on issues facing New Zealanders, and very different views on human development and pedagogy. This provided a distinct challenge to assumptions held by a number of RTLB of a pre-colonial Māori world, located in the distant past, and lacking a distinctive present or future orientation and relevance.

The pōwhiri,<sup>8</sup> through which RTLB were welcomed onto the course, was presented and understood as a metaphor of inclusion. Pōwhiri begin by acknowledging and respecting differences. (*He tāngata ke koutou, he tāngata ke mātou*).<sup>9</sup> This is represented by the formal encounter between two sets of people (manuhiri<sup>10</sup> and tāngata whenua). The independence and uniqueness of each group is mutually acknowledged and respected, as evidenced in the karanga,<sup>11</sup> whaikōrero<sup>12</sup> and waiata<sup>13</sup>. After acknowledging differences between groups, and recognising how important these differences are for the identity and wellbeing of each group, pōwhiri move on to more inclusive processes such as hongī,<sup>14</sup> hariru<sup>15</sup> and kai,<sup>16</sup> leading on to shared discussion and working together. Having acknowledged each other's uniqueness, and renewed relationships of trust and respect, the two groups can address a common agenda and develop collaborative plans of action. (*He iwi kotahi tātou*).<sup>17</sup> Through this experience in contexts where Māori cultural and knowledge bases prevailed, RTLB were challenged to understand inclusion as a far deeper and more complex process than simply dealing with issues of access and participation.

Only after ensuring that RTLB understood the integrity of this metaphor of inclusion based on acknowledgment and respect for the language and cultural experiences of Māori did the programme turn to bicultural issues and Treaty relationships. This is a key pathway for non-Māori to follow in understanding and supporting tino rangatiratanga.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, space needs to be created for Māori colleagues and whānau to define and determine their preferred curriculum and pedagogical goals. Secondly, non-Māori need to work alongside and support Māori to achieve their goals. Both responses require non-Māori to take an "unknowing" position, rather than an "expert" position, and to recognise the limitations and inadequacies of their knowledge and experiences of things Māori. In the context of the RTLB programme this required RTLB to re-position themselves. First learn more about your treaty partner, learn who they are, where they come from, what are their beliefs and their values, learn to respect their identity and their integrity, learn to seek out their voice, and learn not to speak and act for them. This positioning is vital to successfully maintaining any close personal relationship. It is also a key component of the very powerful Te Kotahitanga<sup>19</sup> professional development programme for teachers of Year 9 and Year 10 Māori students who present challenging behaviour within their classes and schools (Bishop, Berryman, Richardson & Tiakiwai, 2001).

For teachers to assume that because their urban Māori students present difficult and challenging behaviours in class, they have no knowledge or understanding of te reo<sup>20</sup> and tikanga Māori<sup>21</sup> is to risk doing considerable harm to their mana and wellbeing. For a school principal to assume that if he needs to have a school kaumātua, then he can just appoint one is to show major ignorance of tikanga. For another principal to assume that it will be all right to expect the school's kapa haka<sup>22</sup> group to conduct a pōwhiri for international visitors, but then to return to their classes without sharing in the refreshments provided for the visitors is to show ignorance of tikanga. To assume that one Māori teacher can effect cultural change within a whole school or organisation without a commitment from all staff to re-position themselves as learners and to be willing to change their own ways of relating and responding to their Māori students and whānau also indicates ignorance of tikanga. When schools or organisations do this, they put that Māori teacher in a very unsafe position, with respect to both his/her own culture and the power structures of the school.

### "WE KNOW ALL ABOUT MĀORI STUDENTS AND PRAISE"

The following set of assumptions concerning the use of praise with Māori students illustrates how mistaken information and inappropriate generalisation can lead to actions that may cause harm, despite being well-intentioned:

- Māori children do not like to be singled out
- Māori children will become whakamā<sup>23</sup> if they are praised individually
- Public praise of Māori children is culturally inappropriate
- Māori parents don't praise their children.

These assumptions are regularly voiced by well meaning, "culturally sensitive" educators who note how they avoid publicly praising Māori children in case this causes them to become whakamā. Little thought is given to how these children feel when their Pākehā<sup>24</sup> classmates receive regular public praise while their own best efforts appear to go unnoticed. Similarly, it is claimed in a number of academic texts that because Māori culture is a group-oriented culture, any practice that "singles out" people is culturally inappropriate. However, group orientation does not imply group sameness. Timutimu-Thorp (1988) believes that being a strong individual and a co-operative member of a group are roles that did not clash in traditional times and nor do they today. Hare Arapere, referring to gifted Māori children being actively discouraged from "standing out" stated:

This myth should be confined to the grave, the more it is used, the more it becomes a truth. This view has been largely promulgated by Pākehā academics and Pākehā teachers and educators act accordingly. I have a fear that future researchers may trace a relationship between this and the tall poppy syndrome thereby placing the blame on Māori for this kiwi disease. (Bevan-Brown, 1993, p.127)

<sup>8</sup> Welcoming ceremony  
<sup>9</sup> You are a people, we are a people  
<sup>10</sup> Visitors  
<sup>11</sup> Call  
<sup>12</sup> Speeches  
<sup>13</sup> Song, singing

<sup>14</sup> Press noses  
<sup>15</sup> Handshake  
<sup>16</sup> Food  
<sup>17</sup> We are one people  
<sup>18</sup> Tribal authority, chieftainship  
<sup>19</sup> Unity

<sup>20</sup> The Māori language  
<sup>21</sup> Māori protocol, custom  
<sup>22</sup> Māori cultural, performing arts group  
<sup>23</sup> Shyness, embarrassment  
<sup>24</sup> Person of predominantly European descent



Educators often cite their own experiences as proof of the accuracy of the previous assumptions, relating examples where praising Māori children both publicly and privately resulted in the children becoming embarrassed, uncomfortable, withdrawn or even belligerent. However, they are challenged to look beyond the cultural inappropriateness of praise as an explanation for this challenging behaviour. The child may have felt the praise was undeserved. Perhaps s/he did not know the teacher well enough to feel comfortable with the praise or maybe it was delivered in an overly effusive or false manner.

Butterworth (2004) investigated Māori children's interpretation of, and response to teacher praise in a small-scale project. Participants were nine Year 5 and Year 6 Māori students in a bilingual class in a decile 2, mainstream urban primary school where Māori comprised 70% of the roll. A questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews were used to explore students' feelings and views about being praised. All nine students reported feeling "very glad" or "glad" and "very proud" or "proud" when their teacher praised them. Six students reported feeling degrees of shame/embarrassment as well as feeling glad when they were praised by their teacher. However, when these students were asked if they would rather not be praised because they felt both shame and pride, all were adamant that they would still rather be praised. One student, despite feeling *whakamā* on being praised, added that he preferred to be praised in front of the whole class rather than quietly and individually by the teacher: "In front of the whole class so they know I'm da bomb!"

Butterworth (2004) believes a possible explanation for the dual feelings towards being praised relates to the Māori concept of *hinengaro*<sup>25</sup> where thoughts and feelings are inextricably connected to form "a distinctive Māori way of thinking, feeling and behaving" (Durie, 2001, p.86). The interlinking of emotional and cognitive domains may lead to a continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of praise and may result in a duality of responses to it. Another possible explanation relates to Māori students' lived reality. Durie (2001) suggests that most Māori learners are located at the interface of *Te Ao Māori*<sup>26</sup> and *Te Ao Whānui*<sup>27</sup>. At this interface, with its conflicting values, standards, and "ways of being", Māori students may struggle as they seek the meaning of praise. If a teacher's praise message conflicts with messages received from the wider environment, confusion and mixed feelings are highly likely. However, whatever the cause of some students' duality of feelings about teachers' praise, their desire for this praise to continue was a very clear message from this research.

The students' teacher also reported a range of responses to praise and noted that the children's responses had changed as the year progressed:

I know at the beginning of the year when I've said, "well done", they'd just put their head down ... [later in the year] their smile comes up and also the rest of the class helps with the praise. They either clap or they're also praising the student as well in their group.

This teacher did not interpret the initial negative response to praise by some children as indicating they did not want to be praised, nor that the giving of praise was culturally inappropriate. Rather, she believed the students' responses arose from unfamiliarity with her, with their new class group and with teacher praise in general. The students were unsure as to whether her praise was genuine or not. She continued to use praise and as the students gained confidence and trust in her, their negative responses to praise decreased markedly. Stunned and surprised looks and hanging heads were replaced by smiles and raised heads.

Butterworth's (2004) research revealed also that students regularly told their parents of their achievements at school, a practice actively encouraged by the teacher who checked that they had taken their certificates and tokens home to share with their parents. She also informed parents during classroom visits and at parent interviews. The parents' response was to reinforce their child's achievements with their own praise and rewards. This strengthened the teacher praise messages and further enhanced the children's belief in themselves as effective learners. By being kept informed of their child's learning successes, parents' aspirations and expectations for their child's academic achievement were increased. Parental expectations of children's performance have been shown to effect the child's commitment to their work at school (Hill & Yeung, 2000, cited in Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003). In this research, teacher praise added not only to the students' positive self concept but also to their parents' view of themselves as competent parents and supporters of their child's learning – a real win-win situation!

These findings are contrary to the contention that Māori parents avoid praising their children because they fear being considered *whakahihi*<sup>28</sup>, or because their praise may contribute to their children becoming *whakahihi* (Metge, 1995). Butterworth's (2004) study showed that within their own *whānau*, where there was no risk of praise being misinterpreted as *whakahihi*, parents openly praised and encouraged their children. Similar practices were identified in research on giftedness from a Māori perspective (Bevan-Brown, 1993).

Butterworth (2004) cautions against over-generalising about the effects of praise on Māori students, and emphasises the importance of seeking out and listening to student voices and learning of the complexities involved in their understanding of and response to teacher praise. It appears that the effectiveness of teacher praise and its cognitive and emotional impact on Māori students is strongly dependent on the quality of the relationship the teacher has built up with students over time, and on the relationship built up between the teacher and *whānau* members. Building respectful and trusting relationships takes time, but this is time well spent since it is within these relationships that praise takes on specific cognitive, emotional and cultural meanings.

<sup>25</sup> Seat of thoughts and emotions

<sup>26</sup> The Māori world

<sup>27</sup> The wider global society

<sup>28</sup> Vain, conceited, arrogant

## “WE KNOW WHAT WHĀNAU NEEDS ARE AND HOW TO MEET THEM”

Examples of where professionals have mistakenly assumed they knew what Māori children, parents and whānau needed and how these needs should be met are not hard to find. The following story was told by a Māori child's Pākehā grandmother who was the principal of the school she attended:

I have found the biggest problem with Māori children and my grandchildren in particular, was the perception of the teachers. Often they haven't been to preschools so the teachers say, “Oh, they have had no experience.”

*[Interviewer: And not acknowledging what other experiences they have had, do you mean?]*

That's right, like going to a tangi<sup>29</sup> or travelling around the countryside, or being with your parents or whatever, are not these an experience? ... They got the Resource Teacher of Reading to come and have a look at her .... She claimed that Tessa didn't have the language. She didn't know what to say. She wasn't able .... She didn't have any life experiences. She'd never been anywhere. She didn't know the relationship between her and me. That's when I really went mad. She'd just been to Wellington, been to Auckland and she was involved in athletics, Colgate National Games. I said, “I've got a photo of her from a statue at Paraparaumu. She's been out to the airport. If you have a look at some of your other children they haven't had the experiences that she has had”, but she wasn't going to share it with this woman. That is a Māori choice. They've got to be real comfortable before they will share that .... The Resource Teacher of Reading said she needs some experiences to draw on. What else can I do short of sending her around the world, what else can I do?! (Bevan-Brown, 2002, p. 268)

In the same study a mother reported that she was very happy with the services her son with multiple disabilities received from his teachers and Ministry of Education, Special Education workers. However, she always dreaded Individual Education Programme meetings that followed any holiday period. Invariably she was told that his “development was set back” in the holidays: “I say to them, ‘Are you telling me that I am not teaching him anything? But I do different things at home than you do in the classroom’” (Bevan-Brown, 2002, p.280). The message she received was that the professionals knew best what her son needed and how these needs should be met. Her priorities and efforts were not acknowledged or valued.

Often professionals' assessment of children and whānau needs does not take reo and cultural factors into account, as the following two stories illustrate:

My child's disability is a social disability ... The psychologist came in to observe him playing in the playground at lunchtime. Her observation of the socialisation that was going on was that he was appearing to be having a really good time but that he needed to develop some functional skills for cricket.

It was bizarre. In actual fact he hadn't been having a really good time. He had finished the game in tears because he hadn't really understood what was going on ... I came in towards the tail end and he was really, really upset ... [The psychologist] couldn't read the social moves. This idea that body language is the same no matter what culture is simply not true and so she couldn't read the body language. She really didn't know what was going on. (Bevan-Brown, 2002, p. 294)

Yet another mother told of how her child's speech problems were attributed to his bilingual education:

I said that my other two children are in bilingual education and they don't have the same problem but she just brushed it aside and I went, “Oh, you know, why bother! I am sick of hearing two languages as the reason because it's not true!” She [the psychologist] just did not listen .... It's like they are taking our skill of bilingualism and turning it into something that's negative and they shouldn't do that. (Bevan-Brown, 2002, p. 305)

A final point is that professionals' assessment of a child's needs is often too narrowly focused. A parent explains:

I am conscious that the Ministry looks at the child, not the siblings. But no family operates in isolation ... Tamati does silly things because that is part of the deal [his disability] and she [Tamati's sister] cops the flak. Nobody looked at that and said, “Maybe this kid needs time out. Maybe she needs attention” and this is the wider whānau thing ... We can't get services that look at us holistically, that look at whānau. They look at these kids in isolation. (Bevan-Brown, 2002, p. 300)

These examples illustrate occasions where professionals have mistakenly or too narrowly assessed children and whānau needs. To avoid these situations it is recommended that professionals relinquish their “expert” position and take up an “unknowing” position, and listen carefully to Māori children and whānau to find out what their needs really are. In order to do a better job as a professional, more time and effort needs to be put into establishing and maintaining personal relationships of trust and respect with whānau.

## “WE KNOW WHAT AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH MĀORI LOOKS LIKE”

Most educational professionals assume they know and understand the notion of working in partnership with others – other professionals, parents, family members, and students. However, all too often, especially in interaction with Māori, the “working” part of the partnership begins after one partner, usually the stronger, the dominant, the expert, the more experienced, the more highly paid, has defined the nature of the problem or task, identified the strategies to be tried, and perhaps even prescribed the solution.

This serious power imbalance can be true of partnerships operating at all levels in education, from Treaty of Waitangi partnerships and educational policy development initiatives at national, regional and local levels through to implementing school and classroom action plans.

<sup>29</sup> Funeral

This is neither a safe, nor a respectful basis for educational professionals to establish and maintain partnerships with Māori. Just as the abuse of power and control in inter-personal partnerships can cause serious long-term damage to the less-powerful partner, so also can the abuse of power and control in professional relationships between non-Māori and Māori cause hurt and damage to the Māori partner. This occurs when educational professionals speak and act for and on behalf of Māori and claim to know how Māori think, feel, and what is best for them.

However, there is a more respectful way in which non-Māori professionals can enter into more effective and balanced working partnerships with Māori. This requires learning to think, speak and explain themselves and their work using Māori icons, images and metaphors rather than relying on their own (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Macfarlane & Glynn, 1999). This also requires rejecting assumptions that the icons, images and metaphors of non-Māori language and culture will automatically be understood and appreciated by Māori. The first and most important step in this process is to learn to listen to the voice of Māori. This re-positioning is best achieved in contexts where the language and culture of the Māori partner is validated and affirmed, and where Māori can exercise agency through having control over procedures and protocol. In short, majority culture professionals need to put themselves in the less powerful position, to be visitors in someone else's cultural space (Glynn, Berryman, Walker, & O'Brien, 2001). Good visitors do not tell their hosts what to do and how to do it.

As noted earlier, the RTLB role is one of working in a collaborative relationship with classroom teachers, school management and school communities to promote wider use of inclusive teaching strategies (Brown, Moore, Thomson, Anderson, Walker & Glynn, 2000; Glynn, 1998). These are strategies that allow students experiencing learning and behaviour difficulties to participate more fully in regular classroom lessons. A great many of these students are Māori. Hence, a critical component of the RTLB training programme is exposure to Māori understandings of human development, experiences of growing up Māori and Māori-preferred learning and teaching strategies (Macfarlane, 2000a, 2000b; Macfarlane & Glynn, 1999). One of the course assignments includes the task of presenting a mihi<sup>30</sup> to colleagues and Māori people during an overnight noho marae<sup>31</sup> experience.

A mihi involves two core elements. The first is to greet the icons, images, landscape, tribal ancestors, ancestral house, and the people present on the day. The second is to "represent" yourself in a way that "makes sense" within a Māori worldview. Both of these elements require a shift in mind set – a shift in positioning, a shift away from the familiar ways in which people are introduced within a Western European cultural context. In presenting a mihi, a respectful sense of place needs to be conveyed. RTLB were asked to consider questions like:

- Whose cultural space am I in?
- What do I know about this place, and about these people?
- How will I acknowledge this?
- What should I say about myself in this place, and to these people?
- What is it about me that these people regard important?

RTLB were also asked to try to incorporate appropriate Māori language, icons, images and whakatauki,<sup>32</sup> or at the very least, to practise their pronunciation of all key words, names of key ancestors, names of tribes and sub-tribes, names, of landscape features, and names of people present. They were encouraged to seek help and guidance from Māori. This help and guidance was given unstintingly by Māori colleagues and friends who respected the intent and purpose of their colleagues and of the task.

However, the trainers were stunned by the level of resistance, defensiveness, animosity, anger and frustration this assignment engendered amongst some non-Māori RTLB. Despite assurances that this assignment, together with its mode of assessment, had been devised and planned with the full collaboration of the Māori reference group and the caucus of Māori staff from the three universities involved, the trainers were strongly challenged by non-Māori RTLB on a number of fronts:

- The wharenui<sup>33</sup> was being used for inappropriate purposes.
- Non-Māori pedagogies were being imposed onto Māori.
- If this assignment were to go ahead at all, it should not be marked or graded, because to do so would be belittling or degrading to Māori.
- The assignment was mere tokenism.
- The assignment was not relevant to their work because they worked in areas where there were very few Māori students.

The strength of this resistance, defensiveness and even panic indicated the level of fear that some RTLB had of being required to move out of their cultural comfort zone, and of being asked to learn to change their own, dominant partner behaviour. Despite these protests the assignment went ahead. RTLB presented their mihi in marae all over the country. Without exception, the mihi presented by non-Māori RTLB were graciously received and warmly responded to by local kaumātua, whānau members, Māori teaching staff and whāaea<sup>34</sup> and kuia<sup>35</sup> from Poutama Pounamu.<sup>36</sup>

The experience turned out to be emotionally charged and highly challenging, but also warm and highly affirming for all RTLB. Feedback from around the country for this assignment has been, and still is, overwhelmingly positive. Typical feedback was that initially some RTLB found the assignment frightening and stressful. Nevertheless, on completion of the

<sup>30</sup> Introducing oneself

<sup>31</sup> Sleeping/staying on the same

<sup>32</sup> Proverbs

<sup>33</sup> Meeting house

<sup>34</sup> Mother

<sup>35</sup> Elderly woman, grandmother

<sup>36</sup> Māori Research and Development Centre

assignment they reported it had been extremely positive, worthwhile and very transformative. The experience had focused their attention on how little they knew or understood about just how different Māori worldviews are from Western European worldviews, and just how much they had felt out of their comfort zone. For many, the experience facilitated their first step towards building a personal and more respectful relationship with Māori colleagues, students and whānau.

## CONCLUSION

Education professionals will find it very difficult to build relationships with people they know very little about. They will find it even more difficult if the starting point involves assumptions of sameness, and assumptions that their cultural values and practices around teaching, assessment and intervention will “make sense” for everyone, so that there is little for them to learn from Māori students and whānau, and from their Māori colleagues. It is essential for educational professionals to build relationships of trust and respect with Māori colleagues and whānau, and to understand how contemporary Māori society “works”. This means moving beyond present comfort zones, and engaging and participating comfortably with Māori in authentic cultural contexts where te reo Māori and tikanga Māori can prevail.

### He kanohi kitea

**A face seen is a message understood.**

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# Do You Know Me? E Mohio Ana Koe Ki Ahau?

## A resource for educators

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### ABSTRACT

The article shares some of the reflections of the project team who developed the *Do You Know Me? E Mohio Ana Koe Ki Ahau?* resource for educators, which aims to assist educators in both school and early childhood education services to clarify concerns about young children and take appropriate action. Issues discussed include the context and origins for the project, contrasting models of screening, the importance of relationships and community concern, inclusion, the implications of language, social realities, diversity, and the reflective practice model.

### Practice Paper

#### Keywords

*Early childhood education, effective practice, early intervention, learning difficulties, parent school relationship, reflection, teacher development, vulnerable children, young children.*

### BACKGROUND

The purpose of this article is to share some of the learning and reflections from the Better Information to Address Barriers to Learning project, which led to the development of the *Do You Know Me? E Mohio Ana Koe Ki Ahau?* resource at three trial sites in 2006. The title was informed by the learning stories approach as indicated in *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004a), the work of Carr, May and Podmore regarding “the child’s questions” (Carr, May & Podmore, 2000; Podmore, 2003; Podmore & May, 1998; Podmore, May & Carr, 2001), and by the responses of project participants during the development of the resource.

There is ongoing concern in New Zealand about children who for one reason or another are seen as “falling through the gaps”. A number of current government initiatives are aimed at identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable children, including the development by the Ministry of Health of a new “Well Child” health check aimed at four to five year old children (Ministry of Health, 2007) and a suite of initiatives by the Ministry of Social Development aimed at intervening early in the lives of vulnerable children (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). Current Ministry of Education concern lies in effective teaching, including responding flexibly and appropriately to the needs of learners, engaging effectively with parents and whānau<sup>1</sup>, and in supporting quality providers, for instance, by providing appropriate assessment resources and encouraging the sharing of best practice and innovation (Ministry of Education, 2006). One of the ways in which the Ministry of Education has begun to address this issue is through the Better Information to Address Barriers to Learning project (BITABL). The original project acknowledged that new knowledge was needed about how we could best support schools, early childhood services, social services, specialists, and families to overcome barriers to children’s learning. In particular, we needed to ensure its suitability for Māori, Pasifika and rural children.

The project team has designed a draft resource to assist educators of young children to gain better information to clarify possible concerns, to encourage discussion and to take solution-focused action. A group of site facilitators from within Ministry of Education, Special Education worked with local schools and early childhood education services (ECES) in three geographical areas to design and gain feedback about

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<sup>1</sup> Immediate and extended family.

the resource. The development process included initial work to clarify the parameters of the project, work with educators and other community members in each site to gain commitment to the development process, research and writing of the resource, and several cycles of sharing, trial of the resource, feedback gathering and resource revision. The resource grew and changed considerably over the course of this development.

Recently the draft resource material has been placed in an online environment to continue the development of the resource and to support the continuing application at trial sites. The project has been shaped by policy decisions, a literature review, a national advisory group, and a steering group, as well as by independent evaluation. This article shares some of what the project team learned and thought about during this journey.

## REFLECTIONS

### “Screening” or Holistic Community Concern

The concept of universal screening was an important contributing influence to the project. Discussion early in this project focused on whether it could be applied to New Zealand educational settings. There are many potential variations on the theme of screening programmes. Many screening programmes come from medical models, and apply a screening tool to a particular population in an effort to detect and potentially ameliorate specific conditions. A literature review was commissioned to assist the project and noted that New Zealand does not, as a matter of course, screen children for learning or developmental delays within early childhood education or school settings. It found that a number of tools and processes are used intermittently throughout the country. It also concluded that ‘there is significant variation in the tools and processes used internationally. No single tool is recommended or used above all others’ (Fieldsend & Carter, 2005, p. 7).

Although there seems little doubt that recognising children’s needs early across a wide variety of developmental domains and across children’s contexts for learning, can potentially be helpful in preventing the development of more serious difficulties affecting children’s learning (Albers, Glover & Kratochwill, 2007; Elliott, Huai, & Roach, 2007; Seversen, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill & Gresham, 2007; Whitely, Smith, & Hutchinson, 2005) the concept of universal screening draws considerable adverse comment. One demonstration of this was the local reaction reported in the media to the suggestions of the Commissioner for Children, who advocated for regular “checks” on children, based on a Scottish pilot model (Checks on Children Slammed, 2006). One reason for such a reaction within education may be a feeling that “screening” may not adequately address the complexity of social, whānau, and individual factors that impact on children’s learning. Concepts of universal screening may also not have a good philosophical “fit” with holistic and strength-based models of practice. The project team concluded that within education in New Zealand “screening” does not appear to be a particularly productive way of describing or encouraging a community’s concern for

its children within education, although it may be very useful for certain specific conditions.

The project stopped using the term “screening” because of its multiple value-laden meanings. Instead, across the three sites themes emerged from discussions and trial of the resource material that are also consistent with existing literature on effective practice in education. These themes were shared in all sites but with different emphases in different contexts. The themes included:

- partnerships between home and teachers
- engaging a community of learning (including parents, teachers, and wider communities)
- professional learning that encourages pedagogical and knowledge development, collaborative enquiry and reflective practice.

The concept of community – community of concern and community of practice (Buyse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; Jones, 2006; Wenger 1998, 2002) – seemed very applicable to this project. Our project team was particularly informed by discussions about the importance of connecting and sharing information with the diverse communities that make up Pasifika in Auckland, the kaupapa<sup>2</sup> of whanaungatanga<sup>3</sup> from the community in the Gisborne area, and the discussion of parent/school/ECE relationships in Otago.

A community can be empowered to reflect on its children and take action to address barriers to their learning. Providing a resource that can assist the educators who are part of the community to better connect with parents and whānau, clarify concerns and take action is one way to help educators work proactively for their children. If educators and communities can contribute to the development of the resource, they may have greater ownership of it and its implementation. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the project so far has been the constructive work with the local educators from the three sites to develop the resource; as Pollard and James (2006) put it, to explore effective use of mediating tools and artefacts to support collaborative dialogue. In plainer terms, the development of the resource provided a focus to draw people together to think about and act on these issues.

The process of discussing and developing the resource has been valuable in itself. It is a definite asset that the resource remains in a “draft” state, and now has an online community around it to promote such discussion and further development. As such, it continues to invite active and respectful engagement with the communities, partnerships between home and school, and intentional professional learning.

The current understanding of effective educators’ professional development (in that it nurtures communities that co-construct learning and enhances pedagogical practice) suggests that uncritical implementation of procedures is not likely to be productive. Rather, what is needed is ‘an active generative process that entails teachers making change at various levels’ (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003, p. 91). Required and uncritical implementation of procedures

<sup>2</sup> Philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> Relationships.

is not consistent with a context specific, situated approach to professional development (Guskey, 2002) nor with the collaboration involved in professional inquiry that examines practice and seeks information (Robertson, 2005). This resource, therefore, aimed to support the process of guided teacher enquiry.

### Language and Inclusion

The project team members were very concerned that the resource should contribute to inclusive teaching practice. We were aware of the potential for a resource that seeks to identify and address barriers to actually create barriers through a focus on individual pathology and deficit. Language use seemed a crucial part of this and discussion of the language assisted in clarifying many of the issues involved in the project. We discovered that language used reflects underlying, often unspoken beliefs and world views. As the project literature review commented for example, 'the term "barriers" connotes a fixed variable rather than recognising that detrimental influences can be mitigated and addressed' (Fieldsend & Carter, 2005, p. 5). Consideration of the term also suggested discussions about context, and about deficit-based versus strength-based approaches.

Language use can also be influential by what it includes or omits. We were very interested (and at times confused) by the wide variety of terms used in literature in the fields of education, psychology, social welfare and health such as "risk factors", "variables" and "influences". Children are talked about as "vulnerable", "at risk", and "deprived". Their needs are "severe", "moderate", and "mild" or "marginal". They can be "diverse", "resilient", or have "needs". They follow "developmental pathways" toward statistically-predicted outcomes. Often language used seems individualistic and de-contextualises the child's development whereas 'the creation of inclusive school communities ... necessitates ongoing, co-ordinated, systematic efforts to involve parents' (Gorinski, 2005, p. 7). This is particularly relevant in the NZ context where 'Māori human development is embodied in "te ira tangata" ('the principle of people') (Royal Tangaere, 1996, p. 11).

Language is important, and though we often didn't fully realise what was happening at the time, it has often caused us to pause while we considered what we and others were actually saying during the project. As Ballard (2004) points out 'language is how we name the world and assign cultural meanings to who we are and what we do' (p. 96). He suggests that 'a concern for "children" [rather than "learners", or in our view many of the other labels we read] would seem to evoke the teacher as professional but also as a member of a community concerned for its children' (p. 100).

Other discussion points around language for the project revolved around the audience and name for the resource. We deliberately chose the word "educators" in the wider meaning of the word, which potentially encompasses teachers, parents and whānau, or others involved with the child. The name of the resource also seemed of great significance in trying to capture at least some of the key elements within it. *Do You Know Me?* was a question presented previously in work around assessment and

evaluation in early childhood and linked to the belonging strand of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum (Carr, et al., 2000; Podmore et al, 2001; Podmore & May, 1998; Podmore, 2003). This question seemed to the participants to succinctly suggest the child's perspective and the holistic, reflective focus of the resource, and met with widespread approval. As one principal said, "*Do You Know Me?* – it's perfect really."

### Developing Reciprocal and Responsive Relationships

Jones (2006) highlights the necessity of developing reciprocal and responsive relationships between the family and the centre or classroom teacher, because families possess resources of skills and knowledge that educators can tap into, but also because the family is a mediating factor in terms of the child's interactions with the various learning communities the child is involved in.

The family can be seen as a pivotal point and constant frame of reference for the child. At any one time a child is a participant in many communities, not just one. It is the family as the mediating factor that has the knowledge of the child's experience of these things. (Jones, 2006, p 30)

From a family resilience perspective, 'each interaction between home and school is an opportunity to strengthen a family's capacity to overcome adversity and successfully rear its children' (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006, p. 181). The Harvard Family Research Project (2007) suggests that educators need to create mechanisms for continuous family involvement from early childhood to school. They suggest that recent initiatives underscore the importance of co-construction, which refers to the idea that 'home-school relationships are defined by reciprocal activities and trust' including engaging in dialogue with families (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007, p. 8).

During this project the project team learned about some of the challenges involved in the process of engaging families; about teachers feeling that they needed to "drag the parents in from the school gate", about busy parents being less able or willing to be involved with their children's early childhood centre, about differing perspectives about the child between home and education, and about cultural factors that impact on this involvement. Teachers described positive communication, but also acknowledged time pressures and challenges. However, we also learned about the immense value of involving family from stories as told by parents and educators involved in the project. For example, in one moving story from a Pasifika family, teachers' initial concerns about a little girl showing emotional and behavioural difficulties which were affecting her learning appeared to revolve around perceptions of abuse. However, by using the process of family consultation suggested in the *Do You Know Me?* resource, the child's issues and background were discussed with the family, additional help was sought, the concerns were reframed as attachment issues, and this little girl's learning situation improved significantly. More than that, a basis for trust and ongoing family involvement with the school was formed.



## Relationship to Other Sectors

Educators can play a key role in each child's development. Education is, however, only one aspect of provision for children's wellbeing. A recent New Zealand health summit (Canterbury District Health Board, 2007) devoted to the health needs of the under fives clearly demonstrated both the disparity that exists in New Zealand and the wide range of positive responses the community is making to these needs. Just where a project like BITABL might fit was another key issue, but an important one to clarify because without defining the role the task can appear overwhelming.

There are boundary issues for educators in a process that attempts to address barriers to children's presence, participation and learning. One good example of this was highlighted when a few of those involved in the project (educators and facilitators) initially identified poverty as a barrier to learning. Perhaps this was because we felt helpless in addressing such an issue, although there are actually many ways that schools and early childhood services can assist children to overcome disadvantage through innovative practices (Black, 2006). In the draft resource, questions about living context are included to encourage at least some reflection on this issue. Child abuse is another issue that educators may confront, but which can also cause dilemmas (Walsh, 2006). Sections on abuse are included in the resource in order to facilitate educators urgently addressing this issue when it arises.

## Diversity

Phase one of the project was situated at three widely disparate communities: a predominantly Pasifika school and community in South Auckland; a group of largely Māori Kura and Kohanga Reo near Gisborne; and an Otago semi-rural cluster of mostly New Zealand European children. Other examples of diversity included cultural diversity, socio-economic diversity, geographical diversity, and diversity not only between the early childhood and school education sectors, but also within these sectors. Exposure to this diversity was a key learning. In theoretical terms, we knew about the wide variety of communities in New Zealand. The reality, however, is that educators often work within a restricted area. This diversity did point out to us the challenges of producing a resource that was able to be relevant to the wide range of New Zealand communities. The sharing educators did with each other during the project also showed the value of educators being exposed to a variety of experiences.

Differences between the early childhood sector, owning and indeed highly valuing the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which is firmly based in a sociocultural perspective, and the school sector, which can appear more achievement- and competence-oriented, presented both a barrier and an opportunity. Transition to school was mentioned on a number of occasions as a key issue. Early on in the project, it seemed helpful to design a resource that would be appropriate across diverse settings, such as early childhood and school. The resource consequently had the potential through discussion and use, to bring people and communities together, rather than perpetuate barriers between groups. One potential way we saw to bridge the ECES/school gap was to use the concept of

learning dispositions, which provides a useful alternative framework to learning competencies and may provide a common focus between early childhood and school educators. Others have begun to see this as a potential meeting place for educators (Carr, 2006). Consequently, learning dispositions frame a section in the resource designed to help educators reflect on their teaching practice and provision for the child. Feedback from some early childhood educators was very positive about this but it seemed that often educators would need time to learn about this concept and to see whether it might provide a helpful framework for them.

## Realities

At times, we were presented with a strong message that the social realities of local communities needed to be understood and taken into account in a project such as this. Urgent needs in some communities were brought home to us particularly by our project members and contacts from Pasifika and Māori communities. Other reading (Centre for Community Child Health, 2007, Sykora, 2005, Wilms, 2002) and experiences with the project pointed out that vulnerable children do exist in every community, although these needs may lie in different areas for different communities.

An issue that was presented to us by some of the educators concerned resource and service availability. Educators can be strong advocates for their children. Sometimes they saw gaps in resource or service provision and asked the question "if we identify issues, but there are no services available to address these issues, then what happens?" We do believe that the resource, and work that might be associated with it, could potentially play a part in addressing this issue in a number of ways. Examples include: adding to educators' knowledge and skills; helping them to have good processes in place; enabling referrals to services to be better informed and more comprehensive; helping educators to collaborate with parents and caregivers to address issues in new ways, and highlighting areas of need more clearly so that policy and provision can be adjusted.

At the beginning, the project was influenced by knowing that simply asking questions unearths needs. The Pediatric Evaluation of Developmental Status (Glascoe, 2003; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Centre for Community Child Health, 2007) implemented in communities in the United States of America and Australia, demonstrated that simply asking parents the question "Do you have any concerns about your child?" across a variety of developmental domains, facilitates parents in expressing concerns and leads to increased identification of developmental needs. A pilot project, Seeds for Success (Gilmore et al., 2004), demonstrated that asking teachers to reflect in a structured way on the behavioural needs of their five-year-old children led to children being identified and receiving services from Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour that they probably would not have received at that time otherwise. International initiatives such as the Australian Early Development Index have shown that exploring the developmental needs of a community's children proactively can help communities begin to address these needs more adequately (Centre for Community Child Health, 2006).

## Reflective teaching

Florian (2006) states 'difficulties in learning can be reconceptualised as dilemmas for teaching. In this way difficulties in learning are not problems within learners but problems for teachers to solve' (p. 26). Whilst being proactive, rather than using a "wait to fail" model (Elliot, et al., 2007) can cause potential demands on resource and service provision, we believe it also allows educators and communities to find new ways to address the needs of their children, and fits well with the paradigm of reflective teaching. Reflective practice involves open minded consideration of alternative views and understandings, and then examining ways that these can be applied to practice. Educators we consulted were comfortable with the concept of the reflective practitioner, and demonstrated reflection during the project development. The resource adopted this model as the proactive starting point for consideration of children's needs, for making changes that help the environment to better fit the child, and for placing teachers as key members of communities concerned about children.

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Takanga 'etau fohe.

*If we all pull together we will move forward.*

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora te iwi.

*Your food basket, and my food basket, will satisfy all.*

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about *Do You Know Me? E Mohio Ana Koe ki Ahau* can be found on the Ministry of Education website [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

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# Exemplar Assessment for All Learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

This article defines assessment exemplars and considers their purpose in New Zealand school and early childhood contexts. The role of exemplars in supporting assessment for learning and the extent to which education rights and inclusive practice are evident in exemplars are considered. The article suggests that learners with special education needs are not clearly represented within the *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars*, but that diverse abilities are included in the early childhood exemplars. A number of questions are posed for consideration within future exemplar development in order to ensure that learners with special education needs are positively represented and included.

## Position Paper

### Keywords

*Assessment tool, curriculum, educational assessments, effective practices, inclusion practices, learning stories, special needs, teacher development, Te Whāriki.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the last 10 years, exemplars have been introduced to New Zealand schools and early childhood settings as a new assessment strategy. This paper considers exemplars that are currently available in New Zealand and how the exemplars support goals of inclusive practice for all learners. Such consideration is important for educators at a time when the use of exemplars is increasingly embedded in teacher assessment practices, and as projects proceed that are developing curriculum exemplars specifically for learners with special education needs.

## DEFINING EXEMPLARS

A dictionary definition of “exemplar” defines the word as a ‘model or pattern’ or ‘typical or parallel instance’ (Deverson, 2005, p. 372). Exemplary objects are ‘fit to be imitated, outstandingly good’ or ‘illustrative; representative’ (Deverson, 2005, p. 372). ‘The exemplar serves as a showcase of “best practice” assessment efforts’ (Eastern Kentucky University, 2005).

There can be exemplars of many different aspects of education. Two types of international exemplars include *exemplars of practice* in Scotland (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005), and *exemplar lessons* in Italy (teachnet, 2006). When narrowing the field to assessment, exemplars have included the following:

- exemplary student responses, for example student work graded in the “A” range

- expected test answers, i.e. exemplars and rubrics of predicted responses
- exemplars of student achievement that illustrate the range of achievement that could exist in any given level or age (low, average and high achievement)
- snapshots of learning that exemplify a larger experience or sequence of events.

Within curriculum assessment exemplar material produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, three different definitions exist:

An annotated sample of student work produced in response to a set task. Each exemplar illustrates student work based on a particular topic and strand of ... *the New Zealand Curriculum*. (Ministry of Education, 2003a)

A sample of authentic student work annotated to illustrate learning, achievement, and quality in relation to ... *the New Zealand Curriculum*. (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d – teacher notes p. 1)

Exemplars are **examples of assessments** that **make visible learning that is valued** so that the **learning community** (children, whānau, teachers, and others) can foster **ongoing and diverse learning pathways**. (Ministry of Education, 2004e, booklet one, p. 3, original emphasis)

These definitions illustrate an important shift toward acknowledgment that assessment should be *authentic*; that is, assessment exemplars should be of real student work and experiences rather than contrived answers and rubrics. The definitions also highlight the importance of teacher involvement through annotation, and through defining the learning that is valued. The important emergence of the word ‘authentic’ in the definition during 2003 is also critical to highlight.

## PURPOSES FOR USING EXEMPLARS

In New Zealand, exemplars have been produced in two quite different ways by the Ministry of Education. The *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d) have focused on samples of student work moderated to a level. The purpose of these exemplars includes the provision of tangible reference points for levels and the development of consistency of expectations between schools. This aids teachers to decide the “best fit”

level for a student in particular curriculum areas (maths, English, the arts, science, social studies, health & physical education, and technology). The purpose of deciding on a level relates to selection of the most appropriate teaching and learning approaches for students, supported by inclusion within the exemplar resources of curriculum matrices which provide detailed progress indicators.

Schools are encouraged to develop sets of their own school based exemplars which could reflect the sociocultural context of the school and community. Anecdotally, the development process has been described as a powerful learning process for teachers (Poskitt, 2002). Schools that have their own exemplars have found the two sets to be complementary, with the national exemplars useful for moderation, reference points and clarification. Teachers valued the national exemplars for 'Affirming that our benchmarking of exemplars are in line with national assessment' (Poskitt, Brown, Goulton & Taylor, 2004, p. 28).

By contrast, the early childhood exemplars, *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning* (Ministry of Education, 2004e) do not focus on levels. The exemplars are described as episodes of sociocultural learning in action. Teachers are integral to exemplars as they notice, recognise and respond to learners, although parents, education support workers and others can also record assessment narratives. The possible pathways for learning are not constrained by matrices of progress indicators.

The national early childhood exemplars provide illustrative models of how assessment narratives can be recorded for individuals. As a result of these exemplars, portfolios of narrative assessment are then compiled for individual children. The individual portfolio assessments in turn exemplify individual and social learning pathways within the context of the early childhood learning community.

Thus, school based and early childhood exemplars in New Zealand serve quite different purposes. Any discussion of exemplars needs to be mindful of commonalities and differences between the two groups. Development of future exemplars should have a clearly defined purpose and draw on the relevant strengths of each approach.

## ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Assessment *for* learning (formative assessment), is not always the same as assessment *of* learning (summative assessment) (Absolum, 2006; Gardner, 2006). Assessment for learning is 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there' (University of Cambridge Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Formative assessment should support, inform and serve learning (Black, 2006) rather than merely quantify and report on learning.

A key aspect of assessment for learning is empowerment of the learner. In a New Zealand conference presentation, Sutton (2006) drew attention to the importance of three influences on learner motivation and thus achievement: feedback for self awareness, self efficacy and locus of control.

Effective assessment involves students, enhances their capacity for self and peer assessment, sustains motivation, and supports independence. Assessment for learning is thus also a key aspect of ensuring learning is personalised. 'Personalising learning has turned the traditional view of knowledge and learning on its head. Our focus has shifted from viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge to individuals who engage in a dynamic, two-way process' (Ministry of Education, 2006a). Key competencies (Hipkins, 2006; Rutherford, 2005) in the *Draft Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2006b) reflect this broader view of individual learning and achievement by acknowledging and valuing such competencies as participation, contribution and relationships with others.

The *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* and *Kei Tua o te Pae Early Childhood Exemplars* both aim to support formative assessment, but do so in different ways. One way this is particularly clear is with teacher thinking around possible pathways or "next step" learning. The *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* provide matrices which give explicit direction to teachers of expected learning progressions. The early childhood exemplars encourage teachers to draw on knowledge of the individual child within a holistic view of curriculum. Each of these approaches have strengths and limitations.

Initial evaluation of the curriculum exemplars (Poskitt, et al., 2004) suggests that teachers value exemplars as a formative assessment tool. The most frequent comment made to describe the difference that exemplars had made to teaching practice was that they supported teaching to be 'more informed/better focused' (p. 14) and the most frequent category of response to describe the impact of exemplars on student learning referred to 'improved teaching and learning' (p. 15). These aspects were rated by teachers as being more valuable than the matrices for identification of the specific level or sublevel of achievement. Nevertheless, evaluation of the national exemplar development project by Poskitt et al. (2004) indicates that further work is needed to support teachers to directly use exemplars with students and parents.

The early childhood exemplars strongly model the involvement of children and families in assessment, with booklets dedicated to *Children Contributing to their own Assessment* and *Assessment and Learning: Community* (Ministry of Education, 2004e, booklets 4 & 5). Children and their families commonly enjoy interacting with children's individual portfolios, as illustrated in Cameron's learning story in booklet 9 of *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004e, p. 20). As teacher expertise develops, narrative assessment is becoming longer, wider and deeper (Carr, 2006; Cullen, Williamson & Lepper, 2005; Dunn & Barry, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2004e, booklet 7).

Carr (2006) notes that assessment should build on dimensions of strength, including:

- Agency and 'mindfulness (as learners begin "to make these part of their own identity and expertise")' (p. 2)
- Knowing that 'competencies *develop over time*: they are not acquired or possessed at some point in an education; they are strengthened (or weakened) by interactions.

- They are about interactions in contexts that are increasingly wide-ranging.
- They are about interactions in contexts that are *increasingly complex*' (p. 2)

By drawing on dimensions of strength, learners can 'navigate their own routes or journeys', 'develop a navigational capacity' and 'capacity to aspire' (Carr, 2006, p. 5).

The call for multiple routes towards achievement is one that we would support ... What we would like to do is to avoid an assessment which in its fixation on the discrete becomes atomised to the extent that the *relationships between and beyond are erased* ... (Newfield, Andrew, Stein & Maungedzo, 2003, pp. 77 & 79)

## EDUCATION RIGHTS AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

There are several reasons why learners with special education needs should be considered; firstly, the rights of learners and families, and secondly, philosophical beliefs about inclusion and acceptance of diversity. In addition, evidence has shown that strategies that are effective for learners with special education needs are effective for all learners (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bevan-Brown, 2006; Florian, 2006; Rouse, 2006).

Inclusive education principles are further endorsed by the National Education Goals, National Administration Guidelines, Curriculum, and Special Education Policy Guidelines. Information provided to school Boards of Trustees (Ministry of Education, 2003d) included the following statements:

- Every child has the right to learn, to reach their potential.
- The aim of the government's special education policy is to improve learning outcomes for all students with special education needs – at their local school or wherever they attend school.
- The policy affirms the right of every student to learn.

These statements are underpinned by Section 8 of the 1989 *Education Act* (New Zealand Government), which provides for equal rights to primary and secondary education for all students, stating 'people who have special education needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as people who do not' (p. 40). Although it is important that rights have legal status, it is also important that schools do not only enrol learners through coercion. A philosophical commitment to inclusion means that learners are respected and accepted, and diversity is valued.

The Education Review Office (2005) endorses at a systems level that 'Schools that are effective for ORRS-funded students are the same schools that are effective for all students. In these schools, school staff responded to the learning needs of students effectively' (Education Review Office, 2005, p. 1). Thus, through their consideration of special education, schools can enhance their effectiveness for all students. This clearly applies to the early childhood sector also.

Despite the rationale for inclusion, some teachers continue to view learners with special education needs as beyond their

realm of responsibility (MacArthur & Dight, 2000; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Perdue, Ballard & MacArthur, 2001) and have applied exclusionary practices (Massey University, 2002). Specialist staff, through their provision of support for learners, may inadvertently support teachers to devolve responsibility (Dunn & Barry, 2004). Identification of special needs also has an inherent tension between the desire to both identify the optimum learning level and ensure appropriate resources are obtained, versus the negative effects of labelling influencing low expectations, exclusion and discourses of difference. Ideally, "different" exemplars for learners with special education needs would not be needed in school settings; early childhood has such an inclusive approach.

## EXEMPLIFYING ACHIEVEMENT OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

A Ministry of Education definition of assessment is 'the practice of observing children's learning (noticing), seeking to understand it (recognising), and acting on this understanding (responding)' (Ministry of Education, 2004e). Critical to enacting this for learners with special education needs would be the answers to the following two questions: "What is the learning?" and, from the learner, "Do you know me?"

In New Zealand, classes are commonly age-grouped and teachers are expected to accommodate several different levels of learning within their class programme planning. The *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* support learner-centred practice in respect that the resources assist teachers to find and focus on the level at which a learner is achieving rather than age or grade level expectations.

The *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* do, however, indicate "typical" developmental progression through their level structure. The draft *New Zealand Curriculum* (2006b) includes a model which illustrates that the match between the eight levels of achievement and 13 class levels may vary markedly for individual students (p. 34). For example, the model shows that Level One of the curriculum may be the most appropriate level for learners in Years 1 through to early Year 6; the reality is that there are some students that will be working on Level One of the curriculum for all of their primary and secondary schooling. The *New Zealand Curriculum* assumes that Level One is an appropriate starting point for most learners, although in reality, some children aged 3 and 4 are capable of achievement beyond Level Two of the curriculum; for some students closer to age 21 the specific goals within Level One may still be difficult. Despite Ministry of Education provision of special education support, some teachers and specialists question the relevance of *The New Zealand Curriculum* for learners with the most profound cognitive disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2005). There are no *New Zealand Curriculum* exemplars that showcase the learning and achievement of students who cannot read, walk, talk or grasp a pencil.

A cluster group of New Zealand schools have developed and produced exemplars for oral, written and visual language that showcase "pathways within level one" (Central Region Special Schools, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). These exemplars are accompanied by matrices which detail learning progressions

at a micro level. Written English exemplars and guidelines for teachers of deaf students have also been recently published (Kelston Deaf Education Centre & van Asch Deaf Education Centre, 2006). The Ministry of Education is currently funding further development of curriculum exemplars for learners with special education needs.

Key competencies are aspects of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2006b) that may be less likely to have a levels focus. However, key competencies should be seen as part of the curriculum, and not a replacement for the learning areas. This is particularly important to remember for learners with special education needs; working on key competencies, such as managing self and relating to others, must not become an excuse for not planning such learning areas as the arts, technology and social studies. Rather, 'the learning areas provide a structure and suggest contexts in which these competencies can be developed, using appropriate pedagogy' (Ministry of Education, 2006b, p. 1). Teachers have the responsibility of finding and using this "appropriate pedagogy"; what works best for their community of learners.

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, has no achievement related dilemma because '*Te Whāriki* is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special learning needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood settings' (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 2). *Te Whāriki* states that 'the needs of the children, not assessment procedures, should determine the curriculum' (p. 29). Key aspects of curriculum assessment in early childhood education include emphasis on practices that support children as competent learners, a holistic view of learning, and acknowledgement of reciprocal relationships between children, adults including parents, and the learning environment (Williamson, Cullen & Lepper, 2006).

The early childhood exemplars, *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004e), include a diverse range of children's abilities and learning throughout the resource, and in a booklet dedicated to inclusive practice. A narrative assessment learning story approach is used throughout the early childhood exemplars; learning stories are 'a form of documented and structured observations that take a story and a credit approach' (Ministry of Education, 2001, cited in Molloy, 2005). The learning stories of Jace imitating and making facial expressions and sounds (Ministry of Education, 2004e, booklet 1, p. 11) and of Kian noticing the sound his foot makes on a resonance board (booklet 9, p. 22) showcase that assessment for this sector is sociocultural. The emphasis is on learning in the context of environment and interactions, and not reliant on the production of products.

Blaklock (2006) critiques the level of rigour, verification and objectivity within learning stories, describing them as exercises in "creative writing".

In early childhood, there has been strong resistance to developmental approaches in recent years (Williamson, 2004), as this approach 'ignored culture, community contexts, shared interests and the importance of peer- and adult-mediated learning' (Williamson, et al., 2006, p. 21). Williamson, Cullen and Lepper (2006) investigated the

assessment of teams of families, early childhood teachers, early intervention teachers, speech language therapists, hospital therapists and paraprofessionals. They found that the learning story approach (Carr, 2001), was able to integrate skill based and strength based models of assessment. The learning stories 'included the richness of the multiple perspectives inherent in the team. The lens for assessment was broadened and the focus shifted to include the child's strengths, the holistic view of the child and the teaching and learning context' (Williamson, et al., 2006, p. 28).

## DISCUSSION

Consideration of the existing exemplar projects is a vital aspect of new exemplar development work, including exemplars for learners with special education needs. Some key considerations should include reflection and reflexivity. Such reflection would mean 'looking beyond the taken-for-granted ways of doing things and exploring alternatives for practice' (Ministry of Education, 2006c p. 7). Reflexivity requires 'the act of suspending judgments by accepting the fact that there are many ways of knowing and coming to know' (p. 7). Applying reflection and reflexivity to the following questions would begin some truly interesting discussion that would enhance any exemplar project initiatives.

- Despite *The New Zealand Curriculum* being for all learners, there are still discourses of learners who are "pre-curriculum". How can we more effectively illustrate that the learning of all school students is covered within the curriculum, and that all students can learn and achieve?
- Despite the philosophical belief in inclusion, to what extent does education in New Zealand really include those with special learning needs? For example, how is it possible that curriculum documents, assessment tools and exemplars can have been developed without examples of learners with significant levels of disability being automatically included, and instead with an assumption that most students will fall into a normative sample?
- In the Information Age (Wells, 2002), how important is it to identify next step progressions and predictive learning pathways? Does this limit possibilities for unique individual learning journeys? A curriculum-centred approach may be described as being learner-centred but the two concepts are in fact very different.
- Is there a danger with matrices that the micro-steps necessary to show learner progress could become infinitesimally small, and become a series of boxes that differ little in concept to checklists and labels? For the student who may spend 16 years on Level One of the curriculum, how does this approach support the teacher to know the individual learner as a person? Do matrices support "assessment for teaching" rather than "assessment for learning"?
- If a holistic learner-centred approach to learning is used in school settings, what support will teachers have to be able to plan for individuals, and how will assessment and reporting be manageable?



- Is it realistic to expect that all class programmes can be adapted for learners with significant long-term special education needs? If not, how does an individual programme manage to avoid being different and isolating for learners? How are functional skills integrated within regular class programmes?
- Is the purpose for assessment always clear and meaningful to teachers? When assessment clearly links to learning it is valued by teachers, but when entwined with practices, procedures, habit, reporting, accountability and record-keeping, learning may lose focus.
- How can exemplars manage to balance authenticity, reliability and validity – and are all these considerations of equal importance?
- It would be impossible to develop exemplars for all areas of the curriculum, for all ages, and across all types of disability. Therefore, how can we promote that the extent to which teachers can *transfer* approaches to assessment for their own students' learning contexts is critical?
- How do we ensure that the perspectives of family and whānau are included in school assessment practices, and are these even more critical for learners with special education needs?
- How can the barriers be broken down between early childhood and school sectors so that issues such as assessment can be considered with more depth and breadth? How can case studies that contribute to cross-sector connections (for example Carr & Peters, 2005) be shared with a wider audience?
- How do narratives and learning stories contribute to an assessment toolkit which includes a range of assessment tools and approaches?
- How might the use of Key Competencies in the *Draft Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2006a) influence ideas about assessment with particular reference to dispositions for learning (Carr, 2001; Carr & Claxton, 2002; Sadler, 2002) and teaching stories (Podmore, 2006)?

## CONCLUSION

In the context of this discussion on assessment and exemplars, it is important that we continue to be both reflective and reflexive in order to ensure that we understand the rationale for our practices, and that these practices are inclusive of learners with diverse ability levels. We all have a responsibility to critically question whether our assessment approaches and beliefs are truly inclusive for all learners so that special education is conceptually included in projects and not retrospectively added on as something separate. In the ideal world, curriculum exemplars for learners with special education needs would not be constructed separately. This would also remove the focus on the label “special needs” and return the focus to where it belongs: learners and learning. Exemplars can best support assessment and teaching when their purpose goals are clear, when we critically question and reflect on our practices, and when we include all learners.

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# Culturally Responsive Whānau Relations for Including Māori Students in Education

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from two studies<sup>1</sup> that each aimed to develop understandings of how to more effectively support Māori learners with special education needs. The first study occurred just prior to Specialist Education Services (SES) move into the Ministry of Education. The second study comes from the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EPESE) project. Both studies identified the importance of developing culturally responsive whānau<sup>2</sup> relations for including Māori students in education.

An example of an immersion school's response for including a student identified as having severe behaviour is presented from the EPESE study to exemplify what culturally responsive whānau relations looks like.

## Research

### Keywords

*Behaviour problems, cultural values, effective practices, immersion programmes, kura kaupapa Māori, Māori culture, Māori students, parent school relationship, special education, whānau.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Special Education 2000 policy (Ministry of Education, 1997, 1998) evolved out of an ongoing process that has seen a shift in special education from a position 'where a deficit was seen to be within the learner to that where it is located within the organisation' (O'Brien, & Ryba, 2005, p. 23). This has been accompanied by a focus on what the child can do, that is, from a strengths base rather than any perceived deficiencies or needs base. The policy also clearly signalled that families were definitely expected to contribute their thinking to the education response. Part of the Special Education Policy Guidelines of 1995 required that, 'information about the barriers to learning and the provision of resources were to be shared between families/whānau and education providers' (Mitchell, 1999, p. 34). Subsequently, schools have been increasingly encouraged to include the community in decision making processes with regards to their children's education. The Ministry of Education (2003) also defines the special education services provided for Māori as needing to be where 'tamariki<sup>3</sup> and rangatahi<sup>4</sup> with special education needs and their whānau learn effectively through the provision of culturally competent services, which will ensure mana<sup>5</sup> and tikanga<sup>6</sup> are upheld' (p. 56).

Many educators, however, fail to recognise the overpowering impact that their own culture has on indigenous students and at the same time they fail to recognise the beneficial contribution that their students' own culture can bring to the learning contexts (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Failure to recognise the importance of their students' own prior experiences or "cultural toolkit" (Bruner, 1996) can severely restrict the learner's ability to engage actively in their own learning through meaningful relationships and interactions with others (Wearmouth, Glynn, & Berryman, 2005).

Kauffman (1997) observes that parents and educational professionals tend to hold values and set behavioural standards and expectations that are consistent with those of the culture in which they live and work and that attitudes and behaviour gravitate towards the cultural norms of their families, peers and communities. Educational professionals from the majority culture are in danger of seeing their own culture as "normal" or the "default setting" against which other cultures are viewed as deficient. Where there is conflict between the culture of the child and the culture of the classroom, barriers to learning can be created, often unintentionally. For those who want to better understand the child with special needs, as with any child, it is necessary to understand the culture (the traditional and contemporary values, beliefs, practices, iconography and preferred ways of knowing and learning) of the child and their family. This means looking at current pedagogies and examining ways in which students' own cultural experiences can be integrated into curriculum programming, content and delivery. Importantly, it also challenges educators to reflect critically on their relationships with students and on the role of educators themselves, in perpetuating low levels of student participation and achievement (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003).

Groups of researchers such as Glynn, Berryman, Atvars and Harawira, (1997), Habel, Bloom, Ray and Bacon (1999) and Bishop, et al., (2003) have all studied the needs of students from minority cultures who experienced learning and/or behaviour disorders. These researchers found that students had both clear views of their problems, as well as practical suggestions for improving their learning programmes. Further, when interviewing Māori students Glynn, et al., (1997) found that these students were also able to suggest worthwhile and fair solutions that were culturally based.

<sup>1</sup> Both studies were undertaken by members of the MOE, SE, Poutama Pounamu research-whānau, within the ethics requirements of the University of Waikato.

<sup>2</sup> Immediate and extended family

<sup>3</sup> Children

<sup>4</sup> Young people

<sup>5</sup> Personal prestige

<sup>6</sup> Traditional cultural practices



Importantly researchers recognised that educators, working with students experiencing learning and behavioural difficulties, needed to be able to build worthwhile relationships with their students before engaging in any other agenda. The following two studies discuss the importance of developing worthwhile relationships in further detail.

### SES SITES OF EFFECTIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR MĀORI

In 2001, Berryman and colleagues used the experiences of Māori families, and the special educators with whom they worked to identify five sites of effective special education practice for Māori, within SES (Berryman, et al., 2002). These sites provided specific details of interventions by special education professionals working from a strengths-based paradigm with Māori students and families. In each site, interviews as chat (Bishop, 1996) were facilitated with the service providers, the clients and anyone else determined by these groups as important to the intervention. These conversations were aimed at generating ideas about why the interventions had been effective for the Māori clients. At each site Māori elders were an important part of the entire process.

The information from these sites identified the importance of professionals and families forging relationships built on respect and collaboration and working together for the benefit of students. Once relationships such as these had developed, families felt that they were able to bring their own expertise, about their child and their culture, to the intervention. Only when professionals were responsive to families were professionals able to apply their own expertise to further extend the knowledge of the entire team including that of family members.

Looking across the five sites, a number of common features or general characteristics emerged. These involved both professionals and families in:

- Acknowledging and supporting the expertise of the other and thus achieving effective and balanced working partnerships.
- Negotiating collaborative and culturally competent approaches to understanding and resolving problems.
- Demonstrating a willingness to listen to new ideas, and to work beyond their experience and or cultural comfort zone.

Apart from these general characteristics, important Māori cultural values and practices provided a strong cultural foundation upon which effective partnerships and relationships were developed. Further, it was the understanding of these cultural values and practices, and/or the sincerity and commitment by non-Māori to understand, that made for effective relationships with Māori. Māori and non-Māori professionals in these sites, understood the importance of these traditional cultural values and practices in forming collaborative relationships on which partnerships could be built and maintained. They also understood that this was not likely to occur effectively until educators stopped directing how parents would participate in education. This is

especially problematic when students are faced with ongoing learning or behavioural challenges. Examining educational settings where Māori parents participate from choice, rather than by direction, is key. In New Zealand this is most likely to be in settings where Māori students are already experiencing success (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007).

### ENHANCING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION (EEPISE)

In 2004, findings and outcomes from the pilot EEPISE study in three kura kaupapa Māori and one Māori immersion school (Berryman, Glynn, Togo & McDonald, 2004) further reinforced the importance of collaborative relationships and the role and responsibility each individual and/or group of people play in supporting students requiring additional support. Many Māori can still demonstrate descent from waka<sup>7</sup> and key ancestors, enabling them to claim their iwi<sup>8</sup> identity and their hapū<sup>9</sup> and whānau standing. These relationships allow Māori to share a common heritage with a large number of people. Today, whānau identity is increasingly defined not only by one's links to important ancestors, but to contemporary links with people to whom one engages on a regular basis.

Students in these four EEPISE schools were observed and understood to be positioned at the centre of a school-whānau, that is, a community of people – some familial and others not. The school-whānau was further understood to be relating and interacting towards a common vision of helping students to fulfil their holistic potential. Within the context of whānau, each group of people had important roles in generating and maintaining relationships and promoting interactions for the involvement and participation of all concerned. Providing solutions from within home and school contexts and working in collaboration with students, their families and their teachers was essential in all four of these EEPISE schools, as was being able to seek the advice and knowledge of cultural experts. Within the metaphor of whānau, Māori communities already have effective solutions for assessing, finding new solutions as required and more effectively meeting the needs of their students (Smith, 1995). Within a school-whānau model, schools do not expel members of their own whānau but work in collaboration to seek solutions that work effectively for all.

From a socio-cultural perspective, relationships and learning experiences within a whānau context are seen as being very important and able to contribute. Bruner (1996) suggests that from the basis of prior experiences all new learning and sense making takes place. Glynn, Wearmouth and Berryman (2006) further suggest that learners are more likely to develop understandings and skills in contexts where there are regular and sustained interactions with more-informed individuals around “genuinely shared activities”. Activities that are “genuinely shared” are those where both learners and teachers can find shared meaning and purpose. Regular interactions, in contexts such as these, are more likely to result in relationships of respect where learners are developing and refining their identity, their knowledge and

<sup>7</sup> Canoe

<sup>8</sup> Tribe

<sup>9</sup> Sub-tribe

their skills in such a way that interdependent positive social relationships between learning partners, such as were found in these school-whānau, are affirmed and extended (Berryman, et al., 2004).

Contextualised social interactions such as these have been shown to be fundamental to the acquisition of intellectual knowledge and skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1996; McNaughton, 1997, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Cognitive development and social development therefore are understood as being mutually facilitative and inseparable. Cognitive development is acquired through interactions around authentic shared activities in culturally responsive social contexts (Glynn, Wearmouth, & Berryman, 2006). All students, including those experiencing difficulties, are understood to be active agents, engaging in their world through their relationships and interactions within the social and cultural contexts in which they engage. From this perspective, it is the social experiences that drive their cognitive development.

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of working in the zone of proximal development provides a key to understanding the power of social interactions with the role of the more-skilled person working to support students to participate in activities in which they are as yet unable to participate on their own. Glynn, Wearmouth, and Berryman (2006) and others (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) would suggest that these support people do not simply scaffold support for others and then remove it when they judge that the learner can work independently. Rather, they engage in a process of guided participation in contexts where there is reciprocity and mutual influence, where learners work interdependently and new knowledge can be shared and co-constructed. By engaging in guided participation with students experiencing difficulties, whānau helpers (both school and home) gain in knowledge and expertise, and establish or deepen their relationships with the students whom they are supporting. For Māori, these models are also clearly seen in practice within the tuakana-teina model where the elder or more skilled tuakana provides support to the younger or less skilled teina. They are also seen in ako, a model that draws on the interdependent roles of the kaiako<sup>10</sup> and akonga<sup>11</sup> and the reciprocal benefits that emerge when each of these roles interacts in support of the other.

### CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WHĀNAU RELATIONS

Part of a narrative of experience, from three different people (principal, parent, and child) in one of the EEPiSE school-whānau, is presented below to exemplify these culturally responsive whānau relations.

**Tumuaki (Principal):** ... making mistakes is not an issue, it's waiho oku whenu, mauria mai oku painga – heed not my weaknesses, but heed to my strengths, and together we will learn – yeah we've made plenty of mistakes, hell who doesn't?

We talk to parents about that when we have raruraru (problem), it's not focused on the negativity of the issue, the kōrero is focused on what can we do together to help

as a whānau to move forward and we're going through that one right now with a couple of issues and so we're meeting with parents, it's a big people thing, so we're going to be meeting with parents next week and we're going out to the various people in our community, and saying "hey we all got to be on this waka, or else we're not going to do it together, so we do a lot of talk with our whānau".

A mother who enrolled her son in this school talked about the difference that this type of response had made for her and her son.

**Mother:** When both my son and I came in touch with this kura, I decided to try and work it out for him. He was working with SES prior to that, special education, that sort of thing. He had "behavioural problems" quite bad, "dysfunctional" and he just had a whole list of problems that he was going through at the time.

From the time that he started here, it's been a hard journey it hasn't been all good, but just to now, his wairua, his spirit, his self-esteem, his confidence and his learning has just lifted. He got stood down for fighting at the last school, and the other boy that was in the fight never got stood down, but my boy got stood down. I didn't think that was fair or that he was dealt with fairly. The kids knew that he was different and he felt he was different so whenever he got upset or angry, his SES teacher [Behaviour Support Worker] would just jump in and make arrangements for him or movements for him that tended to his needs. He [the son] knew that and he would use that to his advantage, I felt he could never just settle in, whereas here, he was given the opportunity to settle in.

It is important to note the Behaviour Support Worker was responding to only one aspect of the problem, with separation or time-out his most frequent response.

**Mother:** He believes in himself, he is more confident, he's more responsible and the actions that he takes now he realises the outcomes can be detrimental to him and to those around him. I believe that this school has encouraged him too, maybe not as far as the system goes with his academic side yet but more with his spiritual side and this one-on-one, which does really nurture him. And I'll say that for all of them. He had one teacher working with him when he started at this school he just fell in love with her so there was a connection with him straight away.

He then moved up into another class and there was a bit of readjustment for him and the teachers and that sort of took him down a bit. It was hard for him to find his feet again, that sort of thing. At the beginning of this year, it was touch and go whether he would be stood down permanently or carry on and it was at that point that he realised that he had to make some real life choices. A lot of communicating was done, a lot of talking, a lot of options and it just made him realise you know, what he's got here. The choices that he is going to

<sup>10</sup> Teacher

<sup>11</sup> Student

make are going to affect him for the rest of his life. He took the challenge on, of facing up to his responsibility and buckling down, having to lead, rather than be negative and affect the rest around him.

**Researcher:** How much influence do you think the kura has had in making those changes?

**Mother:** Ooh he never had this at any other kura that he's been enrolled in, this is how I feel personally in this town, he's been to three other mainstream schools and then here. I just believe they gave him love, they gave him a side that the other schools were too set in their mainstream systems ways to see that there were reasons why this boy was doing what he was doing and they were willing to dig that bit harder to find the good in him. I believe that they dealt to a side that my boy hasn't felt since we lived up North, and we came from a small place up North and the teaching up there is done on a one-to-one. He pretty well much found it here, you know. They took him and realised that he was quarrelsome and they pretty much took him on as being part of their own, not just as a child that they were going to isolate from the rest of the school.

**Researcher:** How were you received at these other schools?

**Mother:** It just felt like a job interview going into a mainstream kura, it didn't feel real, it felt like he was just a number. There was no personal touch, yeah just put in the paper work and filed away. They didn't do that here, they went the extra mile to make sure that his needs were dealt to in every way that they possibly could address and that was a big difference. Very informal, very much tikanga Māori yeah the comparison between us and mainstream. The interest and the love that they give out is just part of their kaupapa<sup>12</sup>.

You don't get that in the mainstream, you just don't. They can be just as loving and kind and I'm not radical I'm just saying it for what it is but at the end of the day I felt that you were just part of the system, you were just a number and you were filed away like anything else. This is why a lot of our Māori people get upset because my partner is a mobster [gang member]. This is why he wanted to go down and kill the principal in those other schools, yeah do a spinout. But in here, it's completely different.

The mother's clear articulation of the difference between the mainstream school response and the Māori medium response speaks to the cultural connectedness and holistic wellbeing she was searching for, with regards to her son's education.

What they have done for him here at school, hasn't just affected him at school, but he's brought that behaviour home. They just love and care for him and listen to him. Gee if you'd seen him two years ago, you wouldn't have thought he was the same kid. Honestly, he never lasted at school until lunch time without getting into a fight or without giving a couple of kids a hiding or without

getting into some sort of trouble or putting a hole in the wall. He's just not the same child at all. If somebody had said this to me a year and half ago, I would have thought I had faith, but I don't know whether you could work miracles that fast with him. But he was just adamant that this is the way that I am, handle it or get out of my face, this is how I'm going to be.

They've dealt to him in a way that you can't put it down on a piece of paper in a mainstream school and file it away, because it's not something that can be done just like that, they've just turned him right around. I mean, but my son has just floated through it all. Because it's completely different here they feel you before they see you, you are part of them and that makes a big difference for your child. You know that your child's wairua<sup>13</sup> is going to be dealt to on a daily basis and that's what he needs to grow. The love and spiritual healing that they've given to him. You can't put that down on a piece of paper. It's been an awesome, enriching loving and fulfilling journey that will give him tools for the rest of his life I suppose.

The son adds his thoughts to these experiences.

**Student:** They understand me and they just understand me better than all the other schools ... all the teachers listen to what you have to say. Yeah. Māori helped me.

**Researcher:** So you're not naughty anymore?

**Student:** Nah, I just changed when I came here in the last year.

**Researcher:** Oh yeah, why?

**Student:** Big change! Because of the teachers they listen, the other school they just used ring up my mum and just send me home, because I hit people but they didn't listen to my reasons why I hit them, but not here.

The following year when researchers were talking to staff from the local Ministry of Education, Special Education office about this study, one of the case workers shared an unsolicited similar experience. He talked about a boy who had been one of his most severe behaviour cases. On enrolment into a new school the behaviours displayed in previous school settings had, with very little intervention from him, begun to be turned around. In his opinion, the intervention was in the relationship that this school had been able to build with the family and the son, and the education context that they had subsequently provided for him. The participants in both stories are one and the same.

## FINDINGS

The EEPiSE research in these schools sought answers from within the culture and traditional discourses of te ao Māori<sup>14</sup>. In the example above, effective and balanced working relationships existed between this principal, the teachers and this mother and son. Each party acknowledged and supported the expertise of the other and all were seen as part of the school-whānau. Relationships involved the following three elements:

<sup>12</sup> Philosophy

<sup>13</sup> Spirituality

<sup>14</sup> Māori worldview

### 1. Manaakitanga<sup>15</sup>

This element involved the physical roles and responsibilities of the school and the home as whānau themselves. People involved themselves with manaakitanga in the school which was extended to the students and families from their community.

### 2. Whakapapa<sup>16</sup>

The second element involves whakapapa connections. In this school the essence of whakapapa connected ancestors to the students and to all points from the past to the present. This principal took the time to learn who this student was. He was seen to come with the strengths and support of his ancestors. This was reciprocated by the mother who also came to know and understood in the same way who the principal and her son's teachers were.

### 3. Wairua

The third element involved wairua, the interconnectedness between te ao tawhito<sup>17</sup>, a Māori worldview and te ao hurihuri<sup>18</sup>. Present day pedagogies, relationships and interactions, came from within the culture handed down from the past. Being able to incorporate aspects of te ao hurihuri with te ao Māori but on Māori terms and as defined by Māori was the key.

Collaborative and culturally competent approaches to understanding and resolving problems were evident in this school. The boy, his mother and the principal all brought their own expertise to defining not only the problem but also the solutions. Problems were then planned for and responded to collaboratively.

### CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY OF RELATIONS

This example exemplifies the importance of time spent building relationships of respect and trust, before trying to initiate and contribute to change. This mother and her son were both accorded the same respectful right to participate in this education setting as knowledgeable and with expertise rather than as needing to be directed as to how and when they will participate.

There was a clear difference in perception between this school and mainstream schools the mother had previously tried to enrol her son in. In this school the vision for strong student identity was supported by the notion that all students were better supported when their family was working collaboratively with the school towards helping fulfil their children's potential. As specific needs and/or skills were recognised, learning opportunities that came from a cultural and ecologically responsive perspective, aimed at better meeting the needs of the students were planned for and implemented. This was often with direct family input. Being aware of individual potential and a planned approach of support for all and by all, based on existing school and classroom evidence was seen to be a key. While family members raised much to be celebrated, they were also able to safely raise concerns and solutions about teaching and learning processes. Although this was not always easy, these

families expected to be a real part of supporting their school to provide the very best in education for their children. While this was often challenging, the culturally responsive pedagogy of relations (Bishop, et al. 2007) evidenced through the interdependent relationships of respect, cultural groundedness, power-sharing and interactive interactions around a common vision was a priority for this school and its community.

In this school, the principal and many of the staff had strong relationships with their community (both Māori and non-Māori) and fully understood the need for collaboration. Sadly, in many mainstream schools when educational decisions about Māori students are being made, families often are not at the table and, more importantly, nor have they been invited. In schools such as these it is more likely that educators can be heard speaking on behalf of Māori families, explaining why these families will not or cannot participate with the school. Discourses such as: "they work"; "they're really hard to pin down"; "they're happy for us to make those sorts of decisions"; "their children don't really want their parents coming to school at this age"; "that family is having real problems so I don't want to add stress", at best do not take respectful consideration of the range of skills and knowledge that rest with family. At worse, they are undermining and belittling. Alton-Lee (2003), in her best evidence synthesis of quality teaching for diverse students in schooling, provides much evidence to show the importance of establishing effective links between school, home contexts and other cultural contexts in which children are socialised. Importantly, schools need to generate opportunities for working collaboratively in ways that can be of benefit to the schools as well as the students they teach. In the three kura kaupapa Māori and the one Māori immersion school in this EEPiSE project, acceptance and acknowledgement of their families' expertise strongly contributed towards improving the cultural, social, and learning outcomes of their Māori students. This success, in turn, strengthened the schools' relationships with their families.

Building trust within these relationships creates the space for families and for professionals and teachers alike to share their expertise and learn from each other in order to increase student participation and enhance and improve the practices that are implemented with their students. This philosophy is supported in the whakatauki<sup>19</sup> "ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari te toa takitini (my strength is not with the individual, but with the many)". This advocates the importance of drawing on the experiences, understandings and knowledge of all people in the community in order to collaborate and work together as one entity in setting and achieving a common focus or goal.

Māori traditionally have a culture that is based on inclusion, and a collective approach to learning and teaching that values all students and takes responsibility for finding ways to meet their needs be they intellectual, physical, spiritual and connected and included with family. In New Zealand, many of the most successful interventions for Māori students experiencing behavioural and learning difficulties have been initiatives from Māori educators that are derived from a

<sup>15</sup> Commitment and care

<sup>16</sup> Genealogical connections

<sup>17</sup> The ancient world of the Māori

<sup>18</sup> The contemporary world, today's world

<sup>19</sup> Proverbial saying or statement



Māori worldview. The specific values, beliefs and structures within Māori society, driven by kaupapa Māori ideologies and practices can help to ensure cultural, collective, collaborative, consensus and controlled representation by all, and for all. However, in order for this to transpire mainstream educators must acknowledge the mana and expertise of Māori, be prepared to work collaboratively in a culturally competent manner, to learn from Māori and change their behaviour accordingly.

## SUMMARY

Within a culturally responsive whānau relations model, power sharing and collaboration is paramount. This narrative of experience provides an example of effective inclusion resulting from a collective and collaborative approach to participation and problem solving that is based on what people can do together rather than on what they can do alone. Contexts such as this ensure students themselves, their families and their educators are all able to bring their own expertise to defining not only the problem but also the solutions. From a Māori worldview there are no individual benefits but rather collective ones, and interdependence is just as valid as independence. These collective ways of working provide a culturally responsive and appropriate platform for generating effective practices that can enhance and sustain the cultural, social and learning needs of all, including students with behavioural needs.

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Mere Berryman and Tracey Togo are researchers from the Ministry of Education, Special Education Poutama Pounamu Education Research and Development Centre. Our work aims to investigate and develop culturally responsive approaches for supporting Māori students and their families in a range of Māori and English language educational settings. Sociocultural approaches to learning and development acknowledge the importance of learners developing relationships, and engaging in learning interactions with more skilled others, from within their own cultural experiences. We have found this to be of fundamental importance if students are to assume autonomy over their own learning.

# Interviewing Disaffected Students with “Talking Stones”

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## ABSTRACT

“Talking Stones” is an interview technique that is designed to support self advocacy, particularly for groups of disaffected school students whose views may be difficult to elicit. It has been developed and refined to incorporate a view of learners as active agents in their own learning and is compatible with reflective practice and a social constructivist view of mind. The technique enables individuals to invest their own meaning in concrete objects which have no intrinsic meaning themselves apart from their own “stone-ness”. Stones do not make the same demands as face to face conversations in terms of communication skills. They have texture, size, shape and colour and enable students to articulate their feelings about themselves in relation to school in ways that may not previously have been open to them. The current paper illustrates how “Talking Stones” lends itself to practice in schools by laying bare problematic relationships and opening up dialogue between, typically, teenagers and staff.

## Practice Paper

### Keywords

*Behaviour problems, ethics, inclusion practices, interviewing, school based intervention, self concept, self esteem, social constructivism, student behaviour.*

## INTRODUCTION

Across the world there is a long history of concern about disruptive, challenging behaviour by school students. In the United Kingdom, for example, in the seventeenth century, students were often armed and there were occasions when they took part in violent mutiny in their schools (Furlong, 1985). According to Ogilvie (1957), students destroyed all the most famous private schools at least once.

As soon as education has become compulsory in a country, controlling the behaviour of students assumes paramount importance (Ford, Mongon & Whelan, 1982). Approaches to educational provision for students seen as experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties depend on current ways of understanding human behaviour and learning. Over the years official responses to behaviour experienced as problematic in schools have varied considerably. The kind of provision that is made really matters. Potentially it can be life-changing, for the better or the worse. Interventions for these students might be punitive and harsh, rehabilitative or therapeutic. For example, there are applied behavioural practices associated with understanding of behaviour as

being controlled by external events. There are also educational or therapeutic practices associated with holistic or humanistic understandings (Cole, 2004).

As Murphy (1995) notes, the dominant view of learning in education over the last few decades has been constructivist. The key principles include the view that knowledge is not passively received by students but actively built up by them. ‘Thus we do not find truth but construct viable explanations of our experiences’ (Wheatley, 1991, p.10). Taken to its extreme this means that there is no reality outside an individual’s mental construction. A teacher cannot know what goes on in students’ heads, but constructs models of what he or she believes to be going on. Teachers give meaning to students’ actions and responses. The same is true of students, who, in their turn, give meaning to teachers’ actions and words (Murphy, 1995).

In recent years a number of researchers have made clear their understanding that the study of individual learning and behaviour cannot be considered in isolation from their social and historical context (Matthews, 1993). Research on sociocultural approaches to learning and behaviour has therefore become increasingly common among educationalists trying to understand how to promote effective teaching (Murphy, 1995). The basic goal of a sociocultural approach to mind is to create an account of human mental processes that recognises the essential relationship between these processes and their *cultural*, historical and institutional settings’ (Wersch, 1991, p. 6). From a sociocultural view concepts are socially determined and socially acquired.

Both constructivist and sociocultural theories are currently exerting considerable influence in educational practice. Common to both perspectives is the view that the process of coming to know is constructive. This means that students are actively engaged in thinking and that the ideas and experiences they bring to situations matter.

Schools play a critical part in shaping students’ beliefs in their sense of self efficacy, that is their ability, responsibility and skill in initiating and completing actions and tasks. The way schools mediate success and failure are crucial to the development of a sense of personal agency (Bruner, 1996). The sense of belonging to, or marginalisation from, that community affects every aspect of participation and, therefore, learning within it, and necessarily affects a student’s behaviour and self perception. Failing to support

the development of students' understanding and ability to act in a social context risks marginalising and alienating young people and rendering them incompetent (Wearmouth, Glynn & Berryman, 2004).

Not addressing the "problems" of non-engagement with their education of significant numbers of disaffected students costs society dearly 'both in terms of reduced economic contribution in adult life and, for some, of criminal activity and prison' (Department for Education and Employment, 1997, p. 78). Research from a number of countries, for example, New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2001), England (Department for Education and Employment, 1997), Wales (National Assembly for Wales Education Department, 2001), Scotland (Munn, Cullen, Johnstone & Lloyd, 2001) and Ireland (Fahy-Bates, 1990; Rudd, 1972; Swan, 1978) has repeatedly shown the detrimental effects of school exclusion to the welfare and future life chances of young people. In some cases, low attendance has been linked to the curtailment of opportunities for educational achievement and qualification and, thus, entry into further education and/or employment.

Research such as this highlights the need to address the issue of school attendance and student disaffection and overall levels of school achievement. These issues are mutually reinforcing. To prevent and deal with them effectively, they, together with the general problem of educational disadvantage, require good intervention programmes.

### **CHALLENGES IN STUDENT SELF ADVOCACY IN SCHOOLS**

Taking the young person's view seriously and attempting to understand his/her perspective is essential to any consideration of how we might understand and address student behaviour that is experienced as problematic in schools (Wearmouth, et al, 2004). It is not always easy to engage with students whose behaviour in schools is experienced as challenging or otherwise worrying. Nevertheless these students have the same basic needs as any other.

Account needs to be taken of how children make sense of their own circumstances and what impression is conveyed to students of others' constructions of them. Everyone both creates his/her own world and is created by it and by others around (Ravenette, 1984). As children actively engage in social interaction we need to be concerned with what they themselves make of the circumstance in which they find themselves in school.

However, ascertaining the child's views 'may not always be easy' (Department for Education and Employment, 2001, 3:3). In many schools professionals will have encountered students with whom communication has been difficult:

Many are socially isolated and, to judge by body language, feel appalled at their own loneliness yet just cannot do anything about it. I well remember the case of 'Peter', undernourished, dirty, smelly, and always alone, but hovering as close to the entrance of the school building as he could manage. Deliberation on the situation led me to try to get him involved in a lunchtime

mutual-support group of students, but was told on the phone by his father: 'I'm not having my son associating with a load of drongos ... I don't want him labelled.' ... I could never find a way to communicate with 'Peter' to see if there was anything the school could do to support him better. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 8)

Some, like "Larry", interviewed in a study of adults' recollections of school, may reject any approach from teachers:

I really didn't want teachers to know me ... They just did their job and no more. I got help when I wanted it – eventually. I didn't want teachers hanging around me. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 8)

### **"TALKING STONES"**

"Talking Stones" is a pedagogic tool that can serve as a sensitive assessment device for student self advocacy which views learners as active agents in their own learning. In doing so, it addresses the challenge of engaging with a student's perspective meaningfully in order to find a positive way through difficult situations in schools, and matches provision to real needs.

This is a powerful projective technique derived from methods related to Personal Construct Psychology and developed from Crosby's therapeutic work with adults (Crosby, 1993). It is important that teachers know of techniques such as "Talking Stones" but there are very strong ethical considerations that must also be taken into account. Young people may have very strong reasons for not wishing to disclose information about themselves. Teachers might well choose to make referrals of students and work alongside those qualified and experienced in using projective instruments such as this.

At the beginning of an interview, the student is given a pile of stones of varying shapes, sizes, colours and textures and encouraged to use these stones to explore their thoughts and feelings about school and themselves in relation to it. The student selects a stone to represent him/herself in school and discusses the attributes of the stone that have influenced his/her choice. S/he then selects more stones to represent significant others in his/her life at school (or the domain about which there is current discussion), describes why they have been chosen, and then places them on a rectangular cloth or large sheet of paper whose edges set a boundary to the positioning of the stones and their distance from each other. Stones, their attributes and their positions in relation to each other can be seen as representing individually constructed meanings.

The "Talking Stones" technique is discussed here with reference to an interview carried out with a 15-year-old student, "Darren".

### **Context of the Study**

Darren was a student in an urban comprehensive secondary school in a socio-economically deprived area in an East Midlands county in England. He was one of a group of ten Year 10, 14-15 year old students, mostly boys, whose behaviour had been identified as of particular concern as a



result of high levels of school absence and reports of serious disruption in class. In an attempt to reduce student absence and the level of disruption in the classroom, an alternative curriculum which included group discussion and counselling as well as additional work experience placements was organised for them for part of the week. It was seen as important to the success of this initiative that the students themselves should be encouraged to express their feelings about themselves and their experiences of schooling, and contribute to the discussion of the provision that was being arranged. "Talking Stones" was the technique used to elicit the views of some of these students. Darren was one of the group who agreed to be interviewed. His interview took place over two separate sessions in the privacy of the office of a Head of Year at times when the group was together for discussion and counselling sessions.

### Darren's Story

Darren was described by his teachers as taciturn, a bully, and a student to be feared by peers. When the class register was called he never acknowledged his name and never talked to staff about anything of personal interest to himself. At the beginning of the first interview, he was given a pile of twenty stones, asked to feel their textures, look at their colours and shapes and then select one to represent himself. He sorted through the pile and picked out a piece of lumpy grey fossilized mud that was full of holes. When asked about this stone he explained his choice in a highly pejorative way:

It's rotten right through. I'm rotten right through ...  
(Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Darren's response was a shock to the interviewer. She had expected reticence but he had volunteered a damning, negative self portrait. He supported his "rotten" identity with a description of incidents outside school where he had been in trouble with the police for drunkenness on the street and for suspected vandalism to property. His own "rotteness", in his view, stemmed from his family background:

I come from a very bad family. My family are all thieves – well, not actually my family, but my cousins are all thieves. They've all been in trouble for stealing. One of them's banged away now for stealing, and there's another one who's a drug pusher ... (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Already he had established a possible link between his reluctance to answer to his name in class and his feelings about membership of his family. The first session with Darren was interrupted after a very short period.

The interview resumed a week later. Darren was first asked to pick out a stone to show what he was like in school. He chose a small, grey, mottled stone with a very rough texture:

... it's rough ... it shows how I mess about in school.  
(Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

The stone represented the quality of his work as well as his behaviour in class:

... it's dark grey and it's black – rough work.  
(Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

He attributed his behaviour and lack of achievement to boredom and victimisation by teachers:

I don't like school very much because I'm just not interested. ... it's not really fair ... if you're brainy the teachers let you talk a bit and laugh a bit – not a lot, but they let you do it a bit if you're brainy, but they don't let me ... (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9).

His sense of victimisation was increased with teachers "giving up" on him, for example, in relation to homework:

I don't think we ought to do homework. Anyway, teachers realise that I'm never going to do it. They realised that I wasn't going to do it when I was in Year 9. So eventually they gave up. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Teachers gave up on him:

... quite a lot. If you're late three times in a week you're meant to get a detention but I don't get it. You're supposed to, but they don't give it to me. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Teachers "giving up" on him appeared to worry him considerably. He thought there might be an intention to exclude him from the school permanently:

Actually they've said that now they're letting it all build up, and when it gets bad enough they're going to get rid of me altogether. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of him it was important to find out whether he had any strengths and interests on which to develop a positive intervention for the future. The interviewer asked whether there was anything that he was interested in:

The thing I'm best at is playing football for X (football team). (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

He chose a medium-sized, smooth stone in vivid shades of red, purple, orange and brown to represent himself on the football pitch because:

It's got lots of different colours in it. ... The red and orange colours, show what I'm like when I'm playing football cos I have lots of different moods when I'm on the pitch, but it shows what I'm like when I'm angry. Sometimes I get angry when I get fouled on the football pitch as well. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

He talked about himself as an aggressive player on the football field:

... one thing about me when I play football – I can get very angry on the pitch. ... If I start a move and someone misses it, for example ... I start the move and get it going and pass the ball, and someone messes it up and just misses it altogether and doesn't score the goal, I get ever so angry. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

This stone was very different in colour and texture from the one that represented him in the classroom. When asked again about the lumpy grey one that he first picked out to illustrate himself at school he said:

It hasn't got any colour. ... I haven't got any colour at school. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Asked how well he would like to be doing with his work, he replied:

At the top for everything. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

What stopped him was that:

I like messing about. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Asked what he would have to do to be at the top he said:

I would have to try harder and not mess about, but the problem is that to be at the top I'd have to do that – to try harder and not mess about. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Requested to pick out a stone that represented "good work", he chose one that was whitish and smooth, a clear contrast to the small, grey, rough, mottled stone that represented both Darren as one who "messes about" and his work as "rough".

The interviewer then set out the stones to represent the two ends of an imaginary line on which both the quality of work and also standards of behaviour could be rated from "very good" to "very bad". Darren was invited to rate his work and his behaviour on this imaginary line in a number of subject areas. In English he indicated the place on the imaginary line as:

Probably just below halfway ... For work and behaviour. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

In mathematics he described himself as:

Here. Near the top ... (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

He explained the reason for the difference between his achievement in mathematics and English:

I used to be just under halfway for maths as well, but I didn't like the teacher then and I asked to change sets, and I like the teacher that I've got now, and my work is much better ... (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

He felt his behaviour was:

Near the top as well. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

Because:

I like the new maths teacher. ... Because he explains things to you. He's funnier as well. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

To represent the new mathematics teacher he chose:

That bright orange stone. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

There was a second orange stone in the pile, but Darren had selected the first:

Because it's smoother. This one is smoother than the others ... he's a better teacher. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

For the "worst teacher", he picked up a small, mottled, grey and black stone:

I've chosen this little kind of lumpy stone 'cos she's really a bit thick. I mean, we have to correct her spellings. ... She's moody as well ... She lets some people do things and not others. If some of the girls say: 'Can we go to the toilet?' she lets them go to the toilet, but she doesn't let us. (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 9)

During the remainder of the interview, the colour and texture of other stones in the pile facilitated further discussion of Darren's interests and began to open up a consideration of future prospects.

## DISCUSSION

As Wearmouth, et al (2004) comment, current moves towards inclusive approaches for all students of statutory school age require a re-conceptualisation of both learning and behaviour as dynamic and interactive between students and the learning environment. Learning occurs through engagement in social situations. We need to know, and take account of, students' own perceptions and understandings in the social context in which that learning is taking place. Pedagogy therefore needs to be interactive and "intersubjective" to take account of individual meaning-making. If this is to occur, teachers need to be able to reflect critically on notions of "behaviour difficulties", inclusion and the values associated with them (Schön, 1983).

"Talking Stones" enabled Darren to discuss himself and his concerns in a way which enabled a much greater understanding of his perspective than had been possible prior to this. The social consequences of his view of himself as "rotten right through" seem to be very harmful. He appeared to be experiencing competing values and expectations stemming from internal idiosyncratic processes or from differing family and sub-cultural values which was leading him to rejection of everything related to school (Ravenette, 1984). Darren had gained little positive from school and was in danger of experiencing only further confirmation of his devalued status.

"Talking Stones" is a flexible pedagogic tool which enables individuals to invest meaning in concrete objects which have no intrinsic meaning themselves apart from their own "stone-ness". Stones have texture, size, shape and colour. They are mobile and can be used to represent movement. They enable students to articulate their feelings about themselves in relation to school in ways not previously open to them. Above all they move the student and meanings mediated by his/her own personal saliences to the centre of the learning process.

From a constructivist viewpoint, there is no separation between learning and personal transactions. Students actively engage in construing themselves and learning about the world through social interaction which itself shapes the pattern of their thought processes. Every act of learning, every act of deviance from social expectation, every refusal to co-operate is a personal engagement (Wearmouth, 2003). The interview technique used here enabled Darren to articulate a perception of himself and a construction of what was happening around, and to, himself that he had not

disclosed before. The transcript provides powerful evidence of a “spoiled” identity (Goffman, 1963). He had constructed a view of himself as “rotten right through” empirically from his experiences at school where he perceived staff as waiting to rid themselves of him, from his membership of a family that he described as thieves and drug-pushers, and from his own treatment at the hands of the police. The use of “Talking Stones” allows us to glimpse more of what the student’s experience is from the student’s own perspective.

Understanding behaviour in this way may not make an act any easier to tolerate in the mainstream class, but it does mean that the behaviour is explicable in the same way as any other. Further, it implies that it is possible to see the world more closely through learners’ eyes and hold dialogue with them.

Darren had been portrayed by teachers as a dour, uncommunicative, inarticulate boy. He had been described as “at very high risk of exclusion” from his school as a result of acts of deviance such as the theft of master keys to the school premises and open verbal defiance of staff in lessons. He was also reported as uninterested in anything school had to offer except for sport, quite frequently under the influence of drugs of one kind or another, suspected by the police of petty crime in the vicinity and a personage feared by many of his peers.

Bruner (1996) comments upon the link between low self esteem and behaviour that can be experienced as challenging to the school system. Self advocacy is hugely important to the development of self esteem. ‘... the management of self-esteem is never settled, and its state is affected powerfully by the availability of supports provided from outside. They include above all the chance for discourse.’ (Bruner, 1996, p. 37)

One of the prime responsibilities of schools, therefore, is to support the construction of a student’s sense of Self through an acknowledgement of agency:

If agency and esteem are central to the construction of a concept of Self, then the ordinary practices of school need to be examined with a view to what contribution they make to these two crucial ingredients of personhood. If school is an entry into the culture then we must constantly reassess what school does to the young student’s conception of his (*sic*) own powers (his sense of agency) and his sensed chances of being able to cope with the world both in school and after (his self esteem). (Bruner, 1996, pp. 38-9)

“Talking Stones” is a useful tool that needs to be embedded into the curriculum. In the process of developing its use with students in schools there are particular aspects which should not be ignored. As Wearmouth (2004) notes, it:

- can only be carried out on an individual basis;
- is time-consuming;
- can be intrusive. Its use is ethically questionable unless there is a positive payoff for the interviewee. Teachers using ‘Talking Stones’ should be aware of ethical principles associated with techniques of a

counselling nature, for example those of ‘non-maleficence’ and ‘beneficence’. As McLeod (1998, pp. 272-3) notes, ‘non-maleficence’ refers to the principle of not doing any harm, and ‘beneficence’ to promoting human welfare. Asking personal questions may be construed as prying into a student’s privacy. It raises the question: what should we do with sensitive information of this sort that is very important to an understanding of an individual, but may be used by some to damn or to reinforce the stereotype? However, raising self esteem is frequently set as a target for students seen as having a low self image. Targets of this sort may be a mockery if we are not aware of major factors in the student’s background such as Darren’s. There are many instances in schools where teachers may find themselves in a situation where students disclose very sensitive information about themselves. Before engaging in any activity where this is likely to happen, including using ‘Talking Stones’, teachers need to familiarise themselves very well with any guidelines that may exist in their own schools about handling information that may emerge from student self disclosure;

- requires an understanding of counselling theory and practice. (pp. 11-12)

In terms of practice it is important to recognise that:

True listening is an art; children will make decisions about people they can talk to and trust, and those they cannot. We know from the counselling literature that good listeners offer time, support, non directive questions, acknowledgement of feelings, reflecting back, and such non-verbal behaviour as eye contact, sitting next to (rather than opposite, behind a desk), and a basically trusting atmosphere which communicates that it is all right to speak honestly.

These are not easy situations to create in school ... (Gersch, 1995, p. 48)

## CONCLUSION

One group of students whose perspective on themselves as learners and on the learning environment it is particularly important to seek is those who are disaffected from school. One way in which a technique such as “Talking Stones” lends itself to becoming a pedagogic tool in schools is in the manner in which it can lay bare problematic relationships between, typically, teenagers and certain members of staff, and open up the dialogue.

“Talking Stones” is a powerful technique and one not to be used lightly. Once a student has begun to disclose personal information, it may be difficult for an inexperienced interviewer to bring about closure in a way that leaves the student in a frame of mind sufficiently comfortable to return to regular classroom activities. The ethics surrounding its use should therefore be taken into careful consideration. To use this technique, teachers might be well advised to work alongside professionals qualified in the use of projective or counselling approaches. Nevertheless, in facilitating students’

self advocacy, the “Talking Stones” technique has the potential to contribute to the “ordinary practices” of schools in developing students’ sense of agency, self esteem and belonging in the world.

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## AUTHOR PROFILE

**Janice Wearmouth**



### Professor Janice Wearmouth

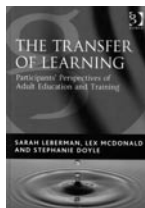
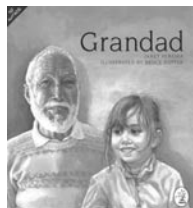
Janice Wearmouth is Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. Her research is primarily focused on bringing together a concern for the learner whose educational experience is problematic with a concern for professionals who have to deal with, and mitigate, the problems that are experienced, and open up opportunities for learning. She developed and refined “Talking Stones” during a piece of research designed to investigate the impact of school processes and practices on young people’s sense of belonging to, or marginalisation from, the school community.

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# Kairaranga Book Reviews



## OBSERVATION: ORIGINS AND APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Valerie Podmore

This book on observational techniques and approaches would be a good reference for any student of early childhood education, practitioner or researcher in the field. Indeed, as a currently employed teacher in an early childhood setting, I found the book a useful resource for understanding observation techniques that can inform my understanding of my children. The book is an easy and informative read that provides information on the theories informing formal observations of children and practical examples of observational techniques in use in early childhood research in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whilst the author packs a lot of information into a small space, my belief is that the historical review is not as comprehensive as suggested. Chapter One provides a succinct discussion and definition of observation, drawing on Smith (1998) and Fleer and Richardson (2004). Podmore then draws on the ideas of Isaacs, Gesell, and Marie Bell to outline the development of the child study movement. The justifications for integrating observations of children into a more holistic paradigm is well made and the influence of *Te Whāriki* well made.

Chapter Two goes more into the learning theories underpinning ideas about the learning and development of children and how these impact on the observations of researchers. Podmore outlines Piaget's learning theory and assumptions about "objectivity" are succinctly located within the empirical scientific paradigm of cognitive psychology. Again, these assumptions are contrasted with the more holistic and socially embedded learning theories of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky that inform sociocultural learning theory. Indeed, the author makes the apparent contradictions of the different approaches succinctly clear. I think Podmore leads the reader to the threshold of important contradictions and tensions between the objectivist model and sociocultural learning theory, but I was left slightly unsatisfied that these tensions were not explored more fully and tentative resolutions perhaps offered.

The remaining chapters are concerned with the processes of making observations, observations in a research context and the nuts and bolts of recording and analysing observations. The chapters provide the reader with a range of different approaches to making informed observations in early

childhood settings. The strengths and weaknesses of each of the different processes for recording observations (event recording, ethnographic processes etc.) are well made and lead the reader to consider the specific nature of behaviours that are of interest in early childhood settings. Numerous practice-based examples are provided that demonstrate the points made.

I was most interested to read more about the use of digital cameras in early childhood settings as this is something that is heavily employed in my work as a kindergarten teacher. Digital cameras have become integral to the process of planning and assessment in early childhood settings. The author takes a "toolkit" approach to the process of observing children.

It is not until almost the end of the book that Podmore makes a more overt attempt to justify the emphasis and importance of sociocultural approaches to observational processes in early childhood settings. Examples are provided of Learning Stories and Teaching Stories. Again, real practice-based examples are used. Podmore concludes with these words: 'Systematic observations contribute to knowledge about young children's worlds, and about learning and development in context. They can help teachers provide high-quality education and contribute to communication with and among families' (p. 105).

I agree.

## REVIEWER PROFILE

Dylan Braithwaite

Dylan is currently employed as a teacher at Greytown Kindergarten in the Wairarapa. Dylan has worked as an academic tutor and marker for education departments at Victoria University, Massey University and the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Title:** Observation: Origins and approaches to early childhood research and practice.

**Author:** Valerie Podmore

**Publisher:** NZCER Press

**Date of Publication:** 2006

**ISBN:** 1-877398-13-6

**RRP:** \$26.40

## GRANDAD

**Janet Pereira**

This book is written to be shared with children and takes the reader on a journey exploring a wonderful relationship between a young New Zealand girl and her grandfather. The journey begins with an exploration of their relationship and evolves overtime as Grandad ages, becomes unwell and subsequently passes away.

The story is set in the Maitai Valley, Nelson where the author spent her own childhood. Both the text, by Janet Pereira, and illustrations, by Bruce Potter, provide a very New Zealand context and flavour that the majority of New Zealand children would relate to.

The book begins by describing the very special relationship that one young girl had with her grandfather and the fun times they enjoyed together, such as swimming in the Maitai river and Grandad playing practical jokes on her. It moves quite quickly into the next phase of Grandad's life when he has obviously aged and become less energetic but still maintains his sense of humour. It then gently leads the reader through a phase of Grandad becoming unwell and eventually dying.

Following Grandad's death the wider family is more fully introduced to the plot. A culturally diverse response to his death is evident where both Pākehā and Māori customs and practices are interwoven with the specific wishes of Grandad in terms of the management of his passing.

The book evokes quite an emotional response in the reader which is part of its power and attraction but one would need to be careful about the timing for introducing it to children, especially if someone in the family had recently passed away.

This is an excellent piece of New Zealand children's literature. It is well written and illustrated and moves swiftly but carefully through the last phases of Grandad's life, with appropriate humour, while weaving in a strong sense of New Zealand identity and cultural diversity. I would highly recommend it to people working with young children either as an introduction to the concept of death or as a support for a young child who may have lost someone close. However, as noted above it would need to be introduced with some caution for the latter purpose.

Overall, a highly recommended resource for those who work with young children.

## REVIEWER PROFILE

**Jo Davies**

Jo is currently the Project Leader for the Ministry of Education review of Early Intervention Services. In October she will take up the new position of Practice Leader Early Intervention for GSE.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Title:** Grandad

**Author:** Janet Pereira

**Publisher:** Reed

**Date of Publication:** June 2006

**ISBN:** 9781869484262

**RRP:** \$16.99

## NEW HORIZONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN ACTION<sup>1</sup>

**Editors: Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton**

This book presents a collection of evidence-based reports from practitioners at Sunfield School in the United Kingdom. The school serves young people with profound autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or complex developmental disabilities and has built a culture of encouraging evidence-based teaching practice to help children be healthy, stay safe, and develop qualities that positively affect their life. The Sunfield Research Institute supports inclusive, child- and family-centred, practice-informing research as exemplified in this book. Teachers and academics have engaged in and reported on what they have found works for them in their teaching practice. This is consistent with current understanding of effective professional development that is context based and involves teachers as researchers enhancing their practice with robust data (for example, Allen, 2005; Cordingley, Bell, Evans & Firth 2005; Guskey, 2002). The book is not a comprehensive academic treatise on educational research but it is a useful model of how theory and practice can merge; it shows what teachers working alongside others can do.

New Horizons has six sections; introduction to evidence-based practice, building communication, enhancing health and well-being, inclusion in the community, the SIECCA curriculum, and preparing for the future. The various chapters within each section are written by practitioners who share the evidence they have gathered. The result is a rich source of practical material ranging over topics such as pre-verbal communication through play, adaptation of social stories for self management, dealing with co-morbid mental health and intellectual disabilities, strategies for strengthening emotional well-being, and collaborative approaches to community inclusion. Two chapters describe the Sunfield Integrated Education and Care Curriculum Approach (SIECCA) that is a comprehensive autism-specific programme.

The final section (preparing for the future) covers not only the area of transitions to the wider community but also includes a chapter entitled 'Research tools for evidence-based practice' that offers a concise summary of issues relevant to conducting research in practice. The chapter author underscores the intention of the book when she states that for 'practitioners, the value of research lies in its ability to equip them with a toolkit of resources which are responsive to the ever changing needs of children with whom they work under the conditions imposed by their environment' (Whitehurst, 2007a, p. 222). While the book will have particular appeal to those working directly with children who have special education needs the demonstration of the "toolkit of resources" makes it of practical value to all practitioners who seek to refine their teaching practice.

In chapter 11 (Changing perspectives on disability and inclusion) Whitehead reports on the learning that resulted from a collaborative project involving students from mainstream and special education settings (a similar New Zealand project

<sup>1</sup> The book launch of *New Horizons* was held 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2007, in Hamilton New Zealand, during *Reflections of special education: The child in the looking glass* conference.

using *MacBeth* can be found in the *Kairaranga* Special Edition, Vol. 7, 2006). A comment from one of the young people involved demonstrates an attitude that is relevant to teachers working with a diverse range of students:

Nothing was challenging – unless you have a challenging angle, it's not challenging. You've got to be willing to give it a go. (Whitehurst, 2007b, p. 163)

This book shares some of "the toolkit" that could help teachers "give it a go".

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## REVIEWER PROFILE

### Dr Bruce Kent

Bruce is a psychologist working for the Ministry of Education, Special Education in Manukau. In recent years he has been a Senior Advisor, Professional Practice with particular involvement in research projects relating to effective teaching practice in special education.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Title:** New horizons in special education: Evidence-based practice in action.

**Editors:** Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton

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## THE TRANSFER OF LEARNING: PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES OF ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Sarah Leberman, Lex McDonald and Stephanie Doyle**

As phrases such as "knowledge society", "lifelong learning" and "student outcomes" become part of the everyday education vernacular, it fits that there is an increased expectation that learning is transferred to a range of situations with optimal impact. This book focuses on the transfer of learning from professional learning and development opportunities to the workplace.

*The Transfer of Learning* introduces the reader to "transfer" in adult education and illustrates the concept via theoretical discussion and case studies. Although written by three tertiary educators, the book is intended for a broad audience of adult learners and adult educators involved in any work-related learning activity. As I read the book I considered its applicability for specialists and educators, who often find themselves in adult learning situations, both as learners (e.g. attending courses, participating in postgraduate study) and educators (e.g. designing/running courses and training sessions).

The authors of *The Transfer of Learning* are New Zealand academics, and while the book is not about the transfer of learning specific to the New Zealand context, the case studies used are New Zealand/Pacific-based. These local reference points may make the Kiwi reader feel more "at home" with what many may find unfamiliar and rather densely-forested territory.

The book has three main parts. The first looks at the theory of transfer, the second provides three case studies that illustrate transfer from the learners' perspective and the third is a reflection on the case studies. Each chapter is designed to be a stand-alone read, yet taken as a whole, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the transfer of learning. The style of writing is academic, but not inaccessible. The chapters are relatively short with good introductions and summaries. Ideas are occasionally represented in diagrams and tables, and text is broken up with clear headings and subheadings.

Throughout the book the concept of transfer is discussed within a broader examination of adult education/learning. I am a new entrant to the adult education literature and this book was my formal introduction to the concept of transfer. For others like me, the general discussion of adult learning may be more useful and interesting than the fine-grained theoretical analysis of what transfer is and is not.

Chapters Two and Three provide a whistle-stop tour of the literature pertaining to learning theories, professional learning and development, and approaches and theories that have wide acceptance in the field of adult education. The sections on *Workplace learning*, *Culture and transfer*, *Professional development*, and *Approaches to adult learning* provide sound and concise reviews of the literature. Having even a general understanding of these ideas would be beneficial for anyone who designs or provides professional learning and development opportunities.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present a series of case studies drawn from management, in-service teacher professional learning and development, and business education. The case studies are from the perspective of learners and their voices are very audible in these chapters. Again, reading about how the case studies related to transfer theory was not as compelling as the more general discussion pertaining to adult learners and the provision of effective professional learning and development.

While practitioners may not find the transfer of learning a compelling theoretical construct, this book provides useful insights and food for thought for anyone who has attended a fantastic one- or two-day course, returned to work highly motivated but then changed their practice very little.

#### **REVIEWER PROFILE**

##### **Anna Kelly**

Anna Kelly is an advisor in the Professional Practice Unit, with the Ministry of Education, Special Education, working on a range of autism spectrum disorder-related initiatives that focus on sharing information and professional learning and development. She previously worked as a speech and language therapist. Anna is currently studying towards a qualification in adult education.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA**

**Title:** The Transfer of Learning: Participants' Perspectives of Adult Education and Training.

**Authors:** Sarah Leberman, Lex McDonald and Stephanie Doyle

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The Editorial Board of *Kairaranga* expresses appreciation to peer reviewers for their time and constructive feedback.



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The peer reviewers named below contributed to one or more of the following journal issues, and have agreed to publication of their names within this acknowledgement:

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- Volume 7 [Special Edition], 2006
- Volume 8, Issue 1, 2007
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- *Kairaranga* considers the following education related papers as written documents:
  - Practice Papers** – Papers celebrating effective practice and implementation of programmes. (Up to 2,500 words).
  - Position Papers** – Papers outlining a writer's view on a current educational issue. (Up to 2,000 words).
  - Research** – Papers summarising research studies involving quantitative and / or qualitative analysis of data, or reviews of the literature. (Up to 3,500 words).
  - Storied Experience** – Papers reporting the experiences of children, parents, caregivers, teachers, support staff and professionals in various learning settings. (Up to 1,500 words).
- \* If you have the kernel of an idea that doesn't quite fit the above please email [kairaranga.journal@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:kairaranga.journal@minedu.govt.nz) and you will be connected with one of our editors who will support you on your road to publication.
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- *Kairaranga* is a journal evolving through work submitted across the education sector. Peer review involves constructive feedback on your written contribution. The suggestions made will help you in editing your final piece of work.
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  - e) This feedback may include an offer of peer support by the Editorial Board for amendments made to the article submitted.
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- Reviewers will take responsibility for the appropriate and correct use of people, places, companies, publishers, etc..
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- We are looking to explore many varied and potentially contradictory views on issues relating to educational practice which may be included within the texts, resources or programmes. This should result in views being expressed that do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editorial Board.

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